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The Atlantic Monthly

OCTOBER 1997

Garrison Keillor

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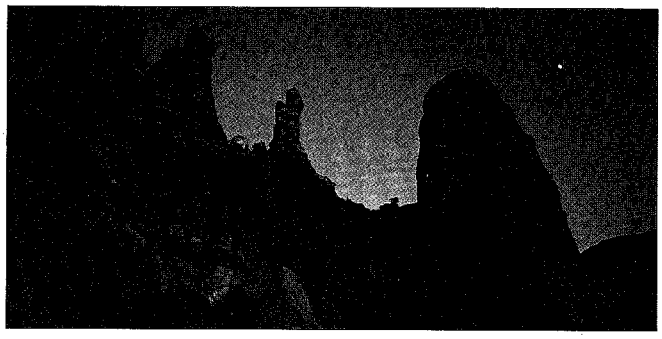

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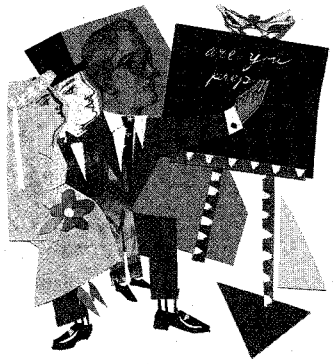

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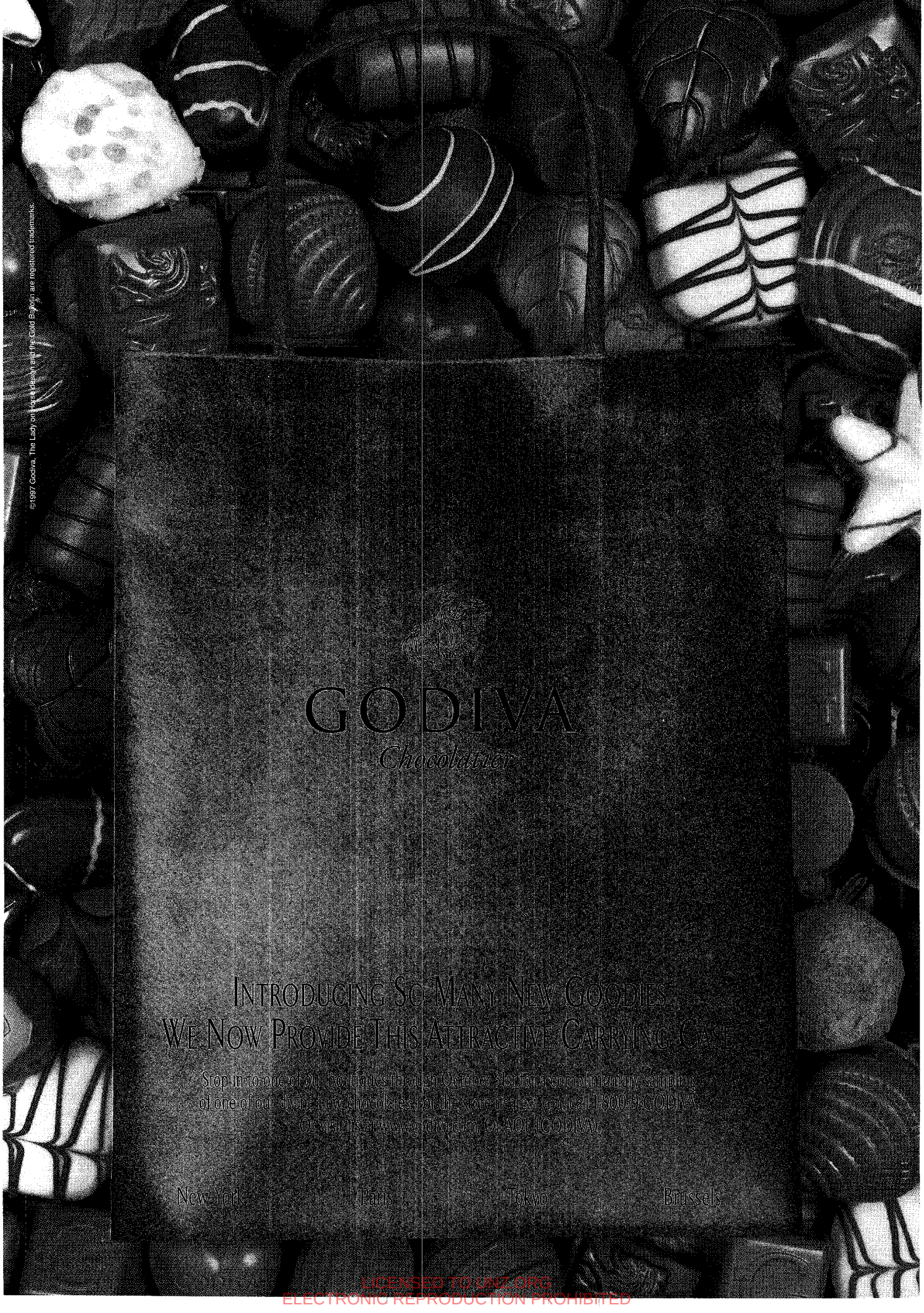

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Above: *Chain Reaction (Anagram)*, 1996, vegetable-dye transfer on paper, courtesy of Pace Wildenstein

Left: Robert Rauschenberg, Alex Hay, and Carolyn Brown performing *Pelican*, New York Theater Rally, May 24–26, 1965

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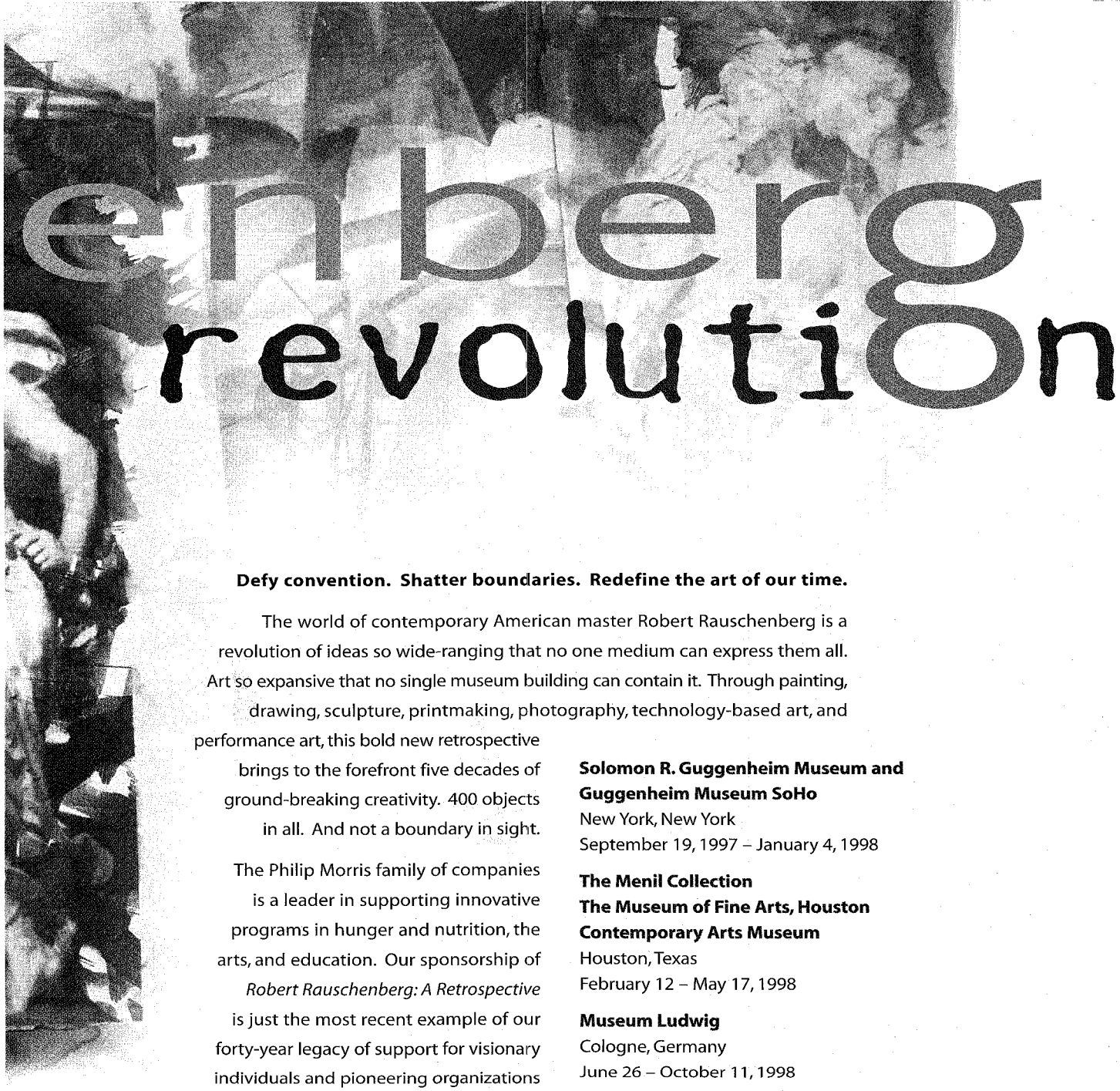

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77 NORTH WASHINGTON STREET

"LITERATURE gives us helps," Edmund Wilson wrote. The computer scientist Marvin Minsky had the same idea when he once likened literature to "an expert system on all the ways people can screw up in life." In her delightfully original new book, *The Year of Reading Proust: A Memoir in Real Time*, from which comes the essay titled "The Music of Silence" in this issue, Phyllis Rose tells how she invited Marcel Proust into her life as a source of sage counsel on all things human.

MARION ETTLINGER

Reflecting on the nature of pleasure, she finds that Proust got there first: "Pleasure is like photography. What we take, in the presence of a beloved object, is merely a negative which we develop later, when we are back at home, and have once again found at our disposal that inner darkroom the entrance to which is barred from us so long as we are with other people." Trying to help her son, who is having trouble with a "downstairs neighbor, who constantly and unreasonably complained about noise," she consults Proust. "Neurotics, Proust counselled, are irritated at the slightest provocation by inoffensive enemies, but as soon as anyone takes the offensive against them, they become meek." She passes the advice on to her son, who has been treating the neighbor with abashed courtesy, and he follows it. The complaining ceases. Proust is proving to be a big help.

With Proust's example stirring her to emulation, Rose examines her own past as daughter, friend, lover, wife, mother, and writer. With Proust's eyes she sees turnings in her life anew. Thus, thinking about why her affair with a man who scorned pop culture (which she loved) ended, she finds that Proust perfectly captured the hopelessness of the relationship. "And . . . if I found Saint-Loup a trifle earnest, he could not understand why I was not more earnest still. Never judging anything except by its intellectual weightiness, never perceiving the magic appeal of the imagination that I found in things which he condemned as frivolous, he was astonished that I—to whom he imagined himself to be so utterly inferior—could take any interest in them."

Phyllis Rose is a distinguished critic and biographer. Among her books are a critical biography of Virginia Woolf, *A Woman of Letters*, which was a National Book Award finalist; a portrait of Victorian marriages, *Parallel Lives*; and a life of Josephine Baker, *Jazz Cleopatra*. —THE EDITORS

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LETTERS

Computer Delusion

In his recent article warning against the use of computers to improve teaching and learning ("The Computer Delusion," July *Atlantic*) Todd Oppenheimer tries to demolish the notion that technology alone will dramatically improve education. But most sensible people who are working to bring technology into the schools understand that computer learning is not a panacea but one important part of more-comprehensive efforts to improve educational achievement. Technology supplements learning and helps to realize every good teacher's goal—finding ways to excite students about learning and challenge them to learn more.

Ironically, Oppenheimer at times doesn't seem to know what, specifically, he should be criticizing. For instance, he acknowledges on more than one occasion that high school students are indeed ready "to confront technology's complexity," and says that the Internet, "when used carefully, offers exciting academic prospects—most dependably . . . for older students." And he further acknowledges the benefits educational technology can offer disabled students. Yet he wants to deny younger students this opportunity to lay the groundwork for future learning. Some are already using computers at an early age; others do not have access to this technology at home or at school, which creates a major new fault line in America.

The U.S. Department of Education is investing in technology as a form of seed capital to attract state, local, private, and nonprofit investments, and to help close the educational-technology gap between rich and poor. Ultimately, the real story is to ensure quality resources for all students. Computers and other learning technologies are an important tool in achieving this goal.

Linda Roberts
U.S. Department of Education
Washington, D.C.

As a teacher of ninth-grade science, I must offer my appreciation to Todd Oppenheimer for his perceptive comments regarding the use of computers in the classroom. In my view, computers do not do what their advocates say they will. Their presence in science rooms means that some experiments are not performed because of the danger they pose to delicate electronic circuitry; teachers must take time that could be spent teaching science to show their students how to use the software.

Most computer time at our school is given over to word processing, an application that, I confess, I am now using to write this letter. Certainly it is easier to edit and rewrite papers electronically than with pencil and eraser. But are machines with Pentium processors required to perform this mundane task? As Oppenheimer asks, at what cost do we provide this technology?

At our state-of-the-art junior high we teachers have received a salary increase of three percent over the past four years, a period that has seen the growth of a small cadre of systems experts and a technology budget that now leases new machines, thus actively competing with teacher salaries for portions of the operating budget. Clearly, what is sacrificed with the advance of computer technology is people.

Richard Fidler
Traverse City, Mich.

As a former creator of award-winning online documentation systems for Microsoft, I know that some information is perfectly suited for ready online access—news, weather, stock quotes, government documents, public speeches, and so forth. However, I would challenge anyone to use the Net to explain the situation in the former Yugoslavia. Nothing online can even closely compare to Robert Kaplan's masterly *Balkan Ghosts* for illuminating this contemporary tragedy.

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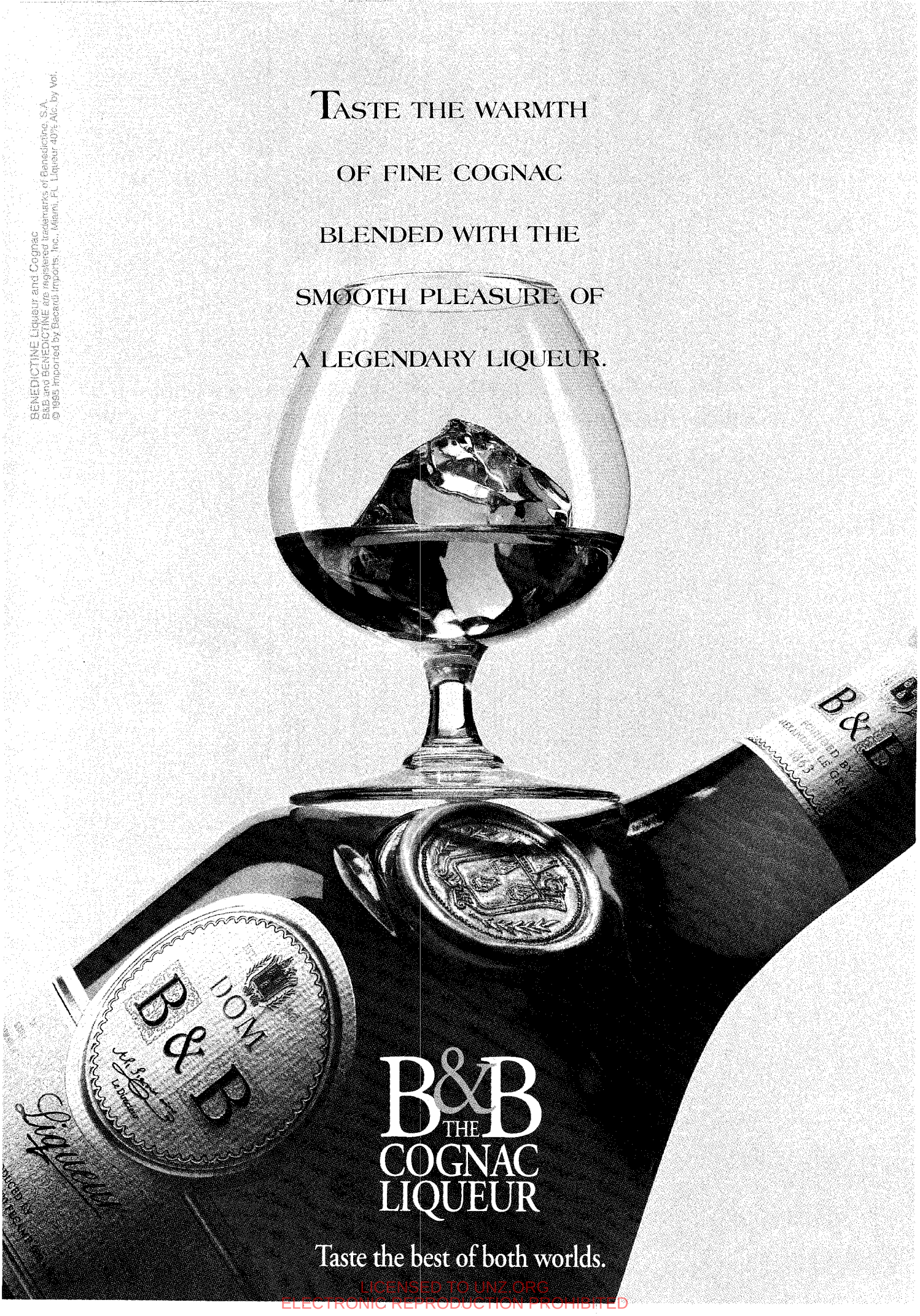

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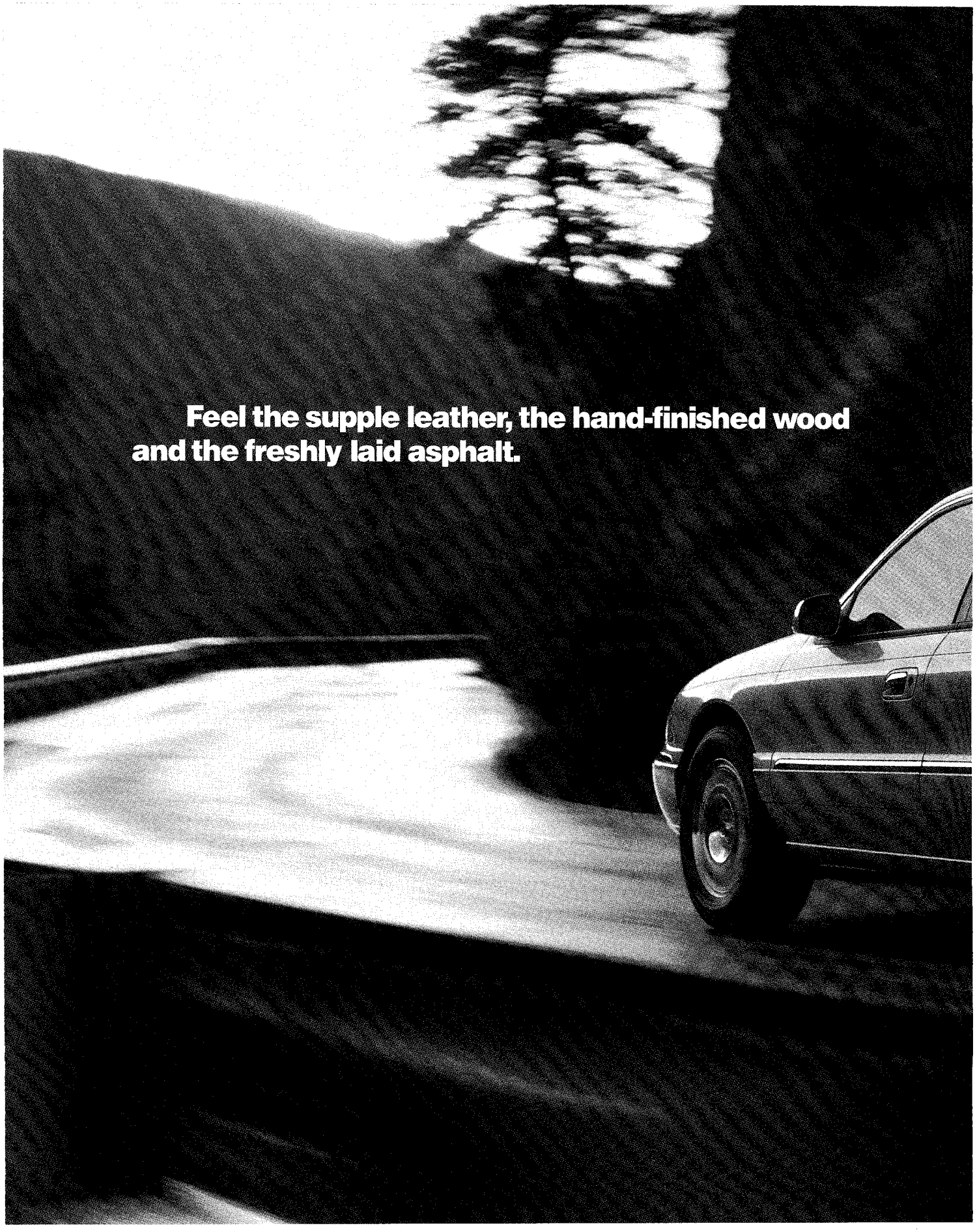

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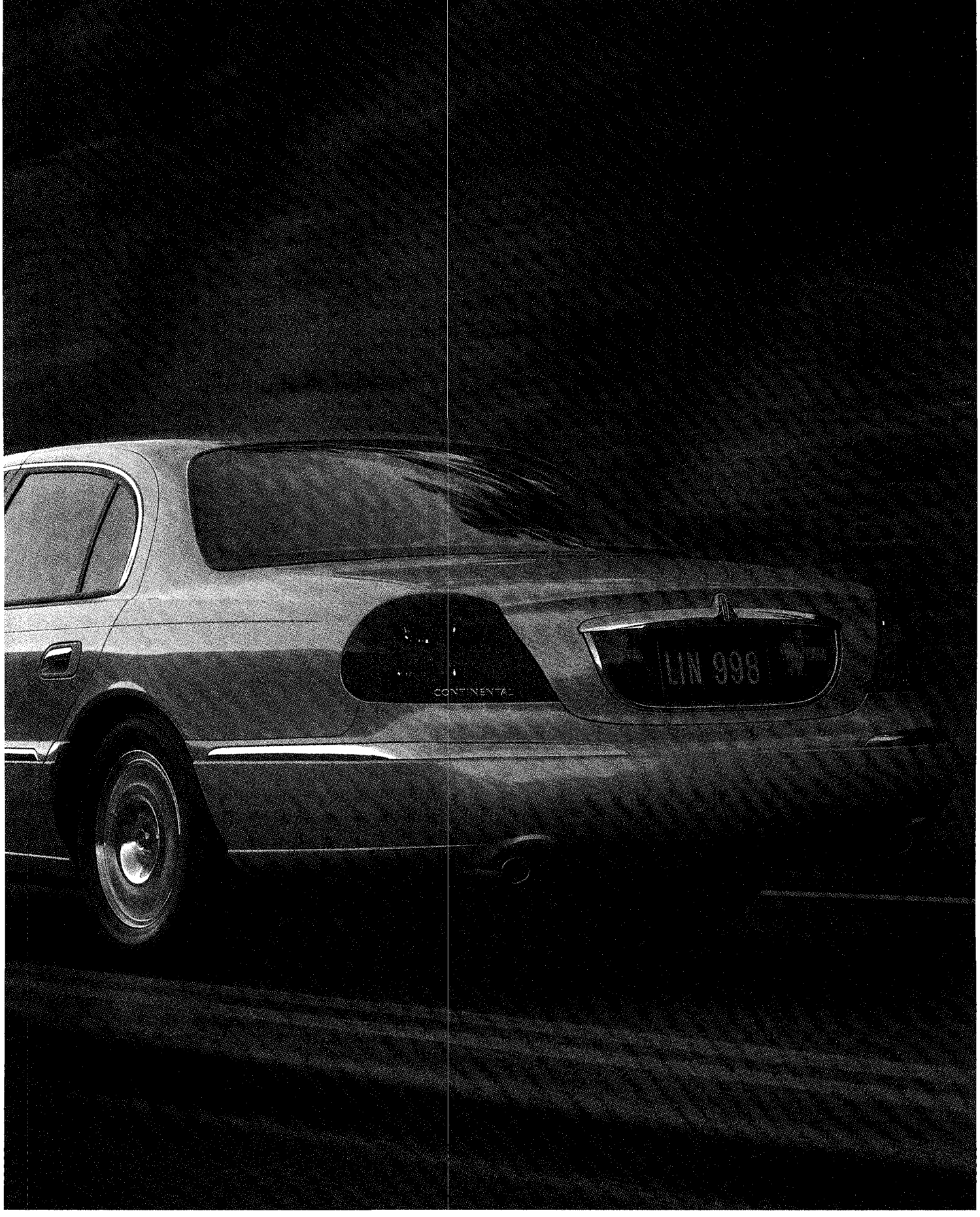

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Several of our local schools just received a grant of $500,000 for computerizing their classrooms. This translates into roughly $200 per student. For the $6,000 per class this represents, I believe that encyclopedias, atlases, subscriptions to the major news media, and an emphasis on critical thinking rather than mere technology would be a better expenditure of resources.

Terry A. Ward
El Paso, Texas

Computers are great supplementary tools—I use them and enjoy their benefits. But a vibrant educator who is not overworked, who is entrusted to be intellectually creative, and who is supported with educational texts far outweighs the benefits of any machine.

Catherine Colglazier
McLean, Va.

In judging the usefulness of technology it is worth remembering that most classrooms would fall short of Todd Oppenheimer's ideals regardless of technology available. Yes, it is easy to find instances in which computers are used too early, too much, and in place of more important subjects. But it is also easy to find instances in which children sit in rows of chairs too early, too much, and in silence and utter boredom. We need to propagate success, and not disregard new tools because they sometimes fail to live up to our idealistic expectations. Many medicines are initially expensive and work in only a small percentage of cases; this doesn't mean that we should ban all federal funding for medicine.

Jeremy Roschelle and Douglas Gordin
American Educational Research Association
San Francisco, Calif.

Todd Oppenheimer replies:

Linda Roberts attacks a straw man. My aim, she writes, was "to demolish the notion that technology alone will dramatically improve education." She then observes that sensible experts don't consider computers an educational panacea. I know that. This article was directed against the more nuanced but still excessive and damaging ways in which computers are being advanced in school, particularly in the lower grades. Yes, some computer programs do just what Ms. Roberts says—excite students about learning and challenge them to learn more. But the evidence is voluminous that most don't go beyond the first step—excitement.

Ms. Roberts says that the Clinton Administration is spending billions on educational technology to give poor schools the same access to computers that rich ones have. This raises questions in itself. Of course no school should be left out of the information loop. But if stimulating classroom technology works most dependably—as I found—in schools graced with bountiful technical support and unusually sophisticated teachers, who is more likely to end up properly served by computers, the rich or the poor? As an editor at *Forbes* magazine once wrote, "In the end, it is the poor who will be chained to the computer; the rich will get teachers."

Jeremy Roschelle and Douglas Gordin rightly point out that traditional classrooms where students passively listen to a teacher's dronings can be numbing too. To say that this justifies filling classrooms with computers is like saying that a losing ball team needs technological assistance. The answer is to rejuvenate the human experience, not dilute it with a mechanical one.

The AIDS Exception

"The AIDS Exception: Privacy vs. Public Health," by Chandler Burr (June *Atlantic*), argues that "it's time to stop granting 'civil rights' to HIV—and to confront AIDS with more of the traditional tools of public health," because AIDS is a leading cause of death for young Americans. But Burr himself practices exceptionalism by focusing on this disease alone. Each year tobacco, alcohol, rich diets, and firearms kill far more Americans than does AIDS, and the "infected" pose substantial risks to others.

If Burr is right, then we should use traditional tools vigorously against these more-dangerous public-health threats. We should require that people be tested for a genetic propensity toward nicotine addiction, alcoholism, obesity, or violence. We should report to the health authorities those who smoke, drink, are obese, or own firearms. And perhaps we should resort to a most effective traditional tool: prohibition. We know that we can save millions of lives by adopting these measures. Public health, it would seem, demands as much. Why, after all, should we grant civil rights to cigarettes, liquor, fat, and guns?

Or perhaps we should take our civil rights seriously. I would no more allow health officials to "search" my blood without my consent than I would let them inspect my home or my diary. The Bill of Rights, moreover, guarantees this: "The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated. . . ." The Supreme Court reiterates the point: "No right is held more sacred, or is more carefully guarded, by the common law, than the right of every individual to the possession and control of his own person." The Constitution is conspicuously silent on the subject of public health, however, implicitly leaving it to the states as part of their police (note the word) powers.

AIDS need not be an exceptional disease. Yet rather than using it as an excuse to increase the power of government over individuals, we should instead reconsider the value of traditional measures. And although there are few good reasons to compel people to submit to HIV tests, there are many good reasons to encourage them to do so. As with any disease, knowing your condition can help you to make better decisions regarding your health and your responsibilities toward your family, lovers, and friends. Rather than expanding its police powers, our government can serve both public health and civil rights by working harder to provide individuals and communities with greater opportunities to obtain the tools necessary for prevention and treatment.

Mark Rom
Georgetown University
Washington, D.C.

I was frankly appalled at your June cover story. As someone who has volunteered in the AIDS community, lost a family member to the disease, and thus seen firsthand its devastating social as

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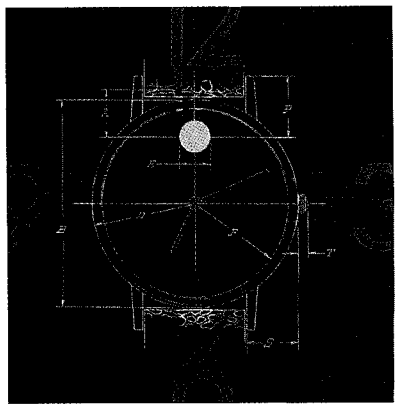

About the legendary gold dot dial: Nathan George Horwitt, the artist, conceived of a watch without numbers as an experiment in pure, functional and "uncluttered" design.

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Museo de Bellas Artes Bilbao, Spain

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well as physical effects, I find the arguments for tracing and testing put forth in your story insupportable. Despite the author's correct assertion that HIV should not be considered a marker for homosexuality (since most cases worldwide are among heterosexuals), in this country those with AIDS are presumed to be in that group and are often treated shabbily and with contempt. Furthermore, Chandler Burr's blithe supposition that those with AIDS are protected by the Americans With Disabilities Act (which has no teeth unless one can afford an attorney to enforce it) and supposed state laws (a vague and specious reference) is indefensible. At our local AIDS service organization we see discrimination being practiced against our clients on a regular basis, and we have to beg the services of attorneys, sometimes fruitlessly, to enforce the so-called protections Burr touts. I find Burr's other presumptions even more offensive, such as his remarking on the "large number of sex partners of many of those who have become HIV-infected." This thinly veiled homophobia makes far-reaching presumptions not just about that community but about anyone with this disease. It is not only offensive and degrading but panders to the basest thoughts and fears of the public.

Joseph Powell
Macon, Ga.

Chandler Burr's concern for the public's health and welfare might make some sense if his basic argument were correct. Unfortunately, it's not. HIV is *not* the virus that causes AIDS, as a growing number of respected research and medical professionals have discovered, following the courageous lead of Dr. Peter Duesberg (*Inventing the AIDS Virus*, 1996) and Dr. Robert Willner (*Deadly Deception*, 1994), among others. Indeed, what Burr's effort accomplishes is to alert all of us to the potential dangers posed by the extraordinary (and Constitution-trashing) powers of the governmental medical-scientific bureaucracy.

The folly of the U.S. government's billion-dollar "war on cancer," which searched for a *viral* cause of cancer and *failed*, was switched circa 1984 to the "war on AIDS," which searches for the *viral* cause of AIDS. It, too, will fail. Is there a *virus* that causes cancer? No. Is there a virus that causes AIDS? No.

By the early 1980s it was apparent that the governmental empire built by fraud and deception in the "war on cancer" was about to implode. But hysteria in the gay community because of an increasing number of deaths from *non-infectious causes* (pneumocystis pneumonia and Kaposi's sarcoma) created an environment in which nonscience and hype prevailed over common sense and scientific methodology. A new virus just had to be the culprit to explain homosexual deaths, or the entire governmental virus-hunting bureaucracy might collapse.

Steven James
New York, N.Y.

Chandler Burr replies:

Mark Rom thinks my reaction will be "Gosh, that's right, we couldn't practice epidemiology and personal responsibility for *all* these." In fact I agree on one level or another with just about every supposedly off-putting example he has included. Take smoking. I am representative here of a growing number of Americans: I do not smoke in part because of the health risk, and I emphatically do not want to help pay the billions and billions of dollars in medical costs annually created by smoking, the single greatest source of preventable disease in this country. If this means some form of cutting smokers out of insurance or state medical aid, so be it. I am quite serious about this. Why, after all, should we grant civil rights to cigarettes, liquor, fat, and guns?

Mr. Rom's constitutional argument is both interesting and unconvincing. The Constitution allows government to do what is rationally necessary to accomplish legitimate ends. This includes blood tests to protect public health.

Joseph Powell accuses me of homophobia. I'm not sure, as an openly gay person, just how homophobic I can be, but this question is rendered irrelevant by a simple epidemiological fact: a large number of sexual partners—that is, promiscuity—is a risk factor for HIV infection. When facts become bigotry, we are all in trouble. I will readily grant Powell's valid caution as to the limited utility of anti-discrimination laws with respect to HIV. But this means we need to make the laws as effective as possible, not sacrifice effective public health because the laws meant to deal with the civil-rights problems inevitably engendered by good public health are not 100 percent potent.

To Steven James, I can only say that the conspiracy theory of AIDS strikes the overwhelming majority of researchers and science journalists as utterly implausible. I am among that majority.

Advice & Consent

Not only does Nebraska budget officer Harlow Hyde ("Slow Death in the Great Plains," June *Atlantic*) fail to acknowledge that perspectives other than his regional-boosterism, population-as-score mind-set may exist and merit discussion, but he neglects to mention the fundamental reason for the population decline in the Great Plains.

For an environmentalist, a falling human birth rate opens the possibilities that we can more quickly improve the lot of those people already here, that a greater number of plants and animals may endure or flourish, that pollution can be curtailed more easily. For the remaining farmers and the farm-related economy, economies of scale may lead ultimately to greater profit, or at least to long-term survival. For tax-revenue-dependent civil servants, things look a little bleak, but the populations and economies of the South and the West continue to expand, creating new government positions open to migrants.

Regarding my second point, for more than a century farms in the United States have increased in size and efficiency. This continuing consolidation, particularly strong in the grain-producing regions west of the Mississippi River, means that fewer farmers and less of the supporting economy remain necessary. So Plains residents understandably move to areas with more promising economies in order to find jobs. Unless Hyde would have us limit farm size and subsidize one region's people, his call to "have another baby" seems unlikely to persuade "some of the nation's strongest families and finest communities."

John R. Ledbetter
Austin, Texas

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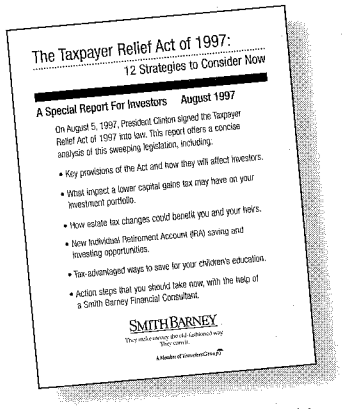
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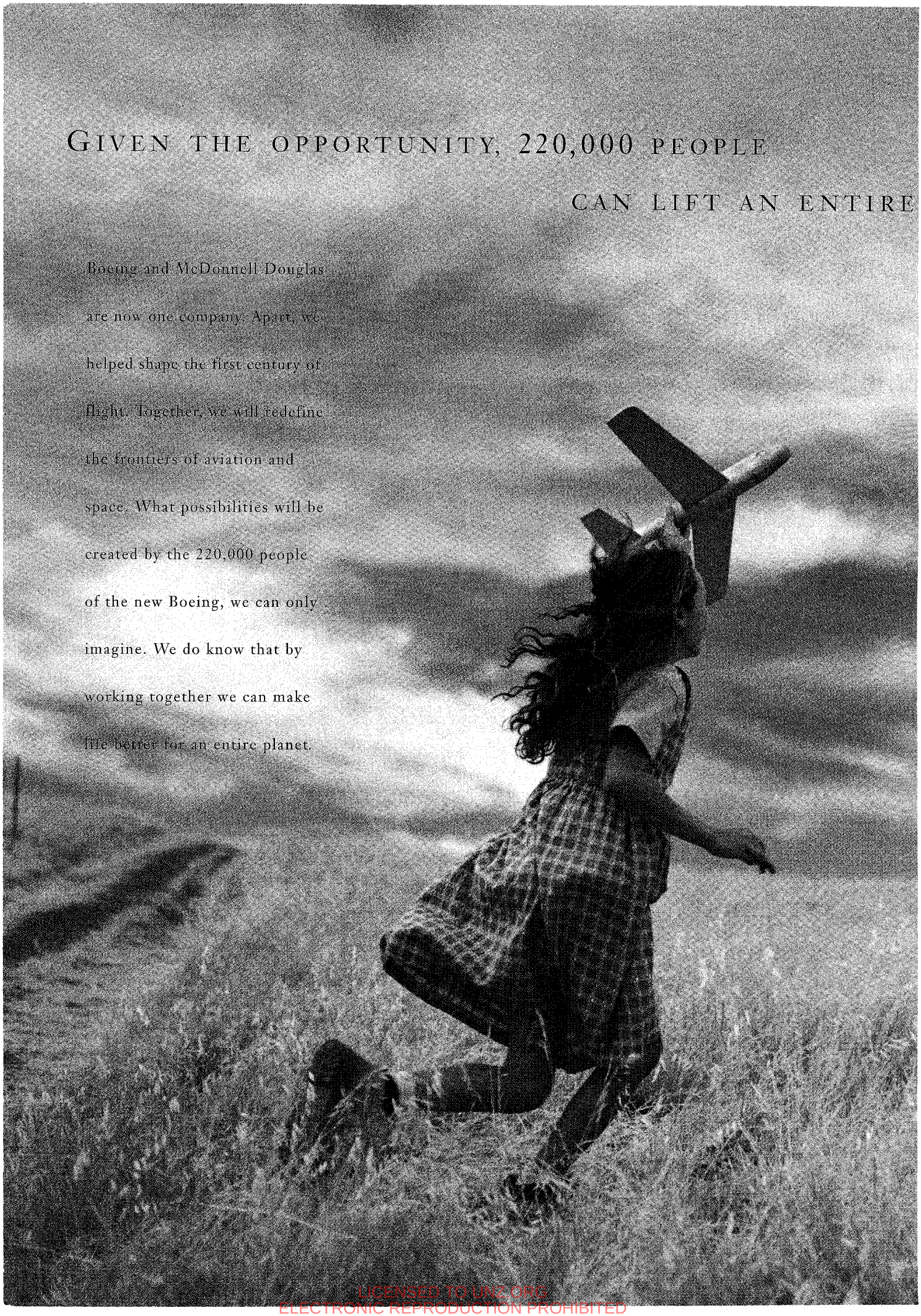

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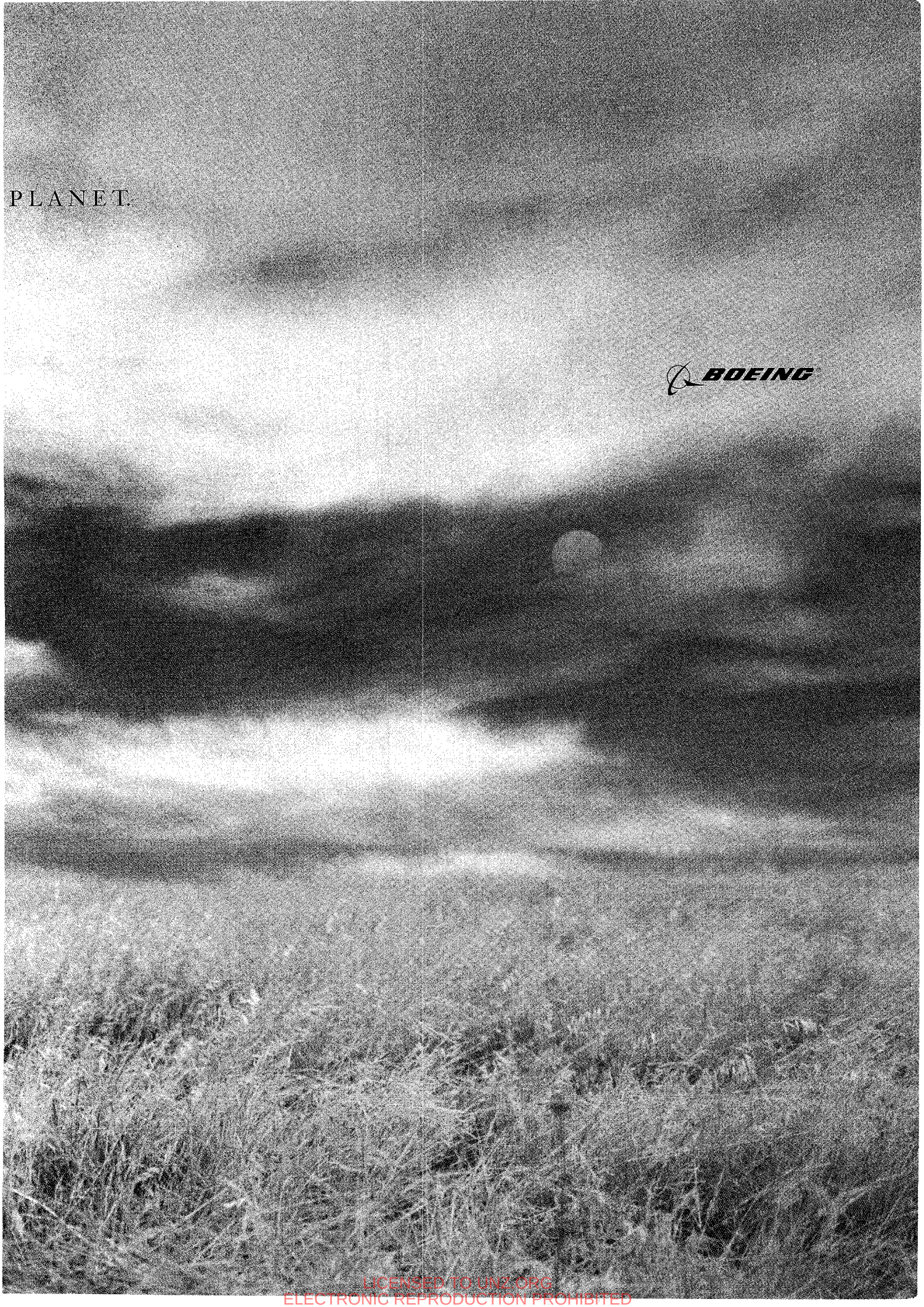

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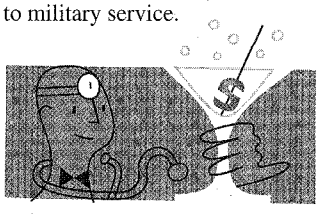
THE OCTOBER ALMANAC

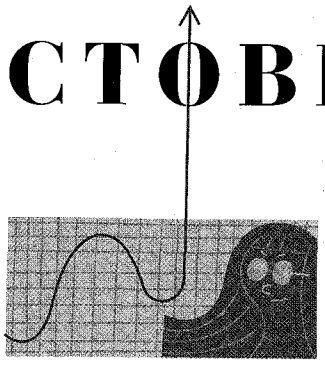
Government

October **1**: The Agent Orange Benefits Act takes effect today, entitling Vietnam veterans' children born with the congenital defect spina bifida to receive up to $1,200 a month from the Department of Veterans Affairs. Congress passed the act after the National Academy of Sciences issued a report citing new evidence that veterans' exposure to the defoliant Agent Orange is likely to have increased their risk of having offspring with spina bifida. According to the Congressional Budget Office, nearly 3,000 people could be eligible for payments, at a cost to the VA of some $325 million over the next five years. In addition, the VA will provide or arrange free medical care for them. This is the first time that the government will compensate children of soldiers for birth defects related to military service.



Health & Safety

October is the peak of the fall social season and brings a surge of philanthropic events, including benefits for hospitals and other health-related causes. A committed donor in New York City or Los Angeles might attend five functions a week (the organizers of the various benefits coordinate their efforts in order to minimize scheduling conflicts). Contributions to health-related causes are surpassed only by contributions to religion and to education, and are on the rise. Last year Americans donated $14 billion to health-related causes—10 percent more than in 1995, the largest increase in any philanthropic category. Some up-and-coming causes are services for the blind and the battles against lupus and Parkinson's disease.

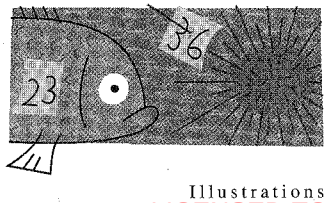


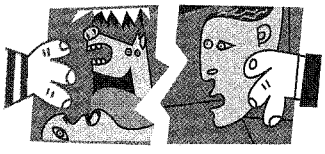
Demographics

October **14** and **18**: More than a million high school juniors are expected to take the Preliminary Scholastic Assessment Test (PSAT) on one of these dates. They will encounter something previous test-takers have not: a writing-skills component, consisting of multiple-choice questions designed to test competency in sentence structure, word choice, and the organization and development of ideas. The new section resulted from a claim filed by the National Center for Fair & Open Testing (FairTest), which charged that the PSAT was a gender-biased exam: although females consistently earn better grades than males in comparable high school and college courses, males have tended to outperform females on the PSAT. FairTest argued that since the PSAT is a qualifying stage for National Merit Scholarships, women's eligibility for college scholarships was being unfairly limited. The new questions are meant to raise the test scores of females, who generally outperform males in measurements of writing skills.

Environment

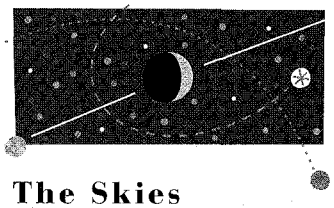
October **16**: The results of Reef Check 1997, the first comprehensive survey of the earth's coral reefs, will be released today. The survey, an international cooperative effort among governments, universities, and environmental groups, involved examining more than 100 reef sites. Volunteers collected data to help scientists assess the health of the reefs: for example, they counted members of certain species, such as grouper and sea urchins. Reefs, although they cover less than 0.2 percent of the ocean floor, are home to fully a quarter of marine species. Scientists currently estimate that 10 percent of the world's reefs have been destroyed, primarily by human activities and their consequences, including shipping, pollution, tourism, and global warming, and that another 30 percent could be destroyed in the next 20 years. Today's results should help scientists make more-precise predictions and work toward reducing human damage to reefs.





Arts & Letters

October **19**: The Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, in Bilbao, Spain, opens today. Funded by the Basque provincial government and operated by the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, in New York, the museum will be devoted to 20th-century American and European art. It has already been widely touted for its design: a series of curved and twisted shapes cloaked in titanium. Among the 300 works that will go on display today are Richard Serra's *Snake* and Willem de Kooning's *Villa Borghese*. Noticeably absent will be Pablo Picasso's *Guernica*, which depicts the destruction during the Spanish Civil War of a small town about 12 miles from Bilbao. The Reina Sofía Art Center, in Madrid, denied the Guggenheim's request to borrow the painting, saying it is too fragile to be transported—a decision seen as political by Basque nationalists. The painting has traveled to more than 30 institutions in the past 60 years.

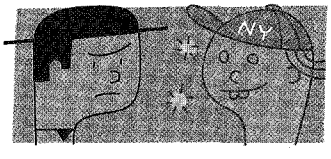


The Skies

October **5** and **6**: Mars, Venus, the red star Antares, and the waxing crescent Moon are broadly grouped on the southwestern horizon after sunset. The first three will be playing tag during the next few weeks. **9–10**: Saturn reaches opposition at midnight, appearing on the side of Earth facing away from the Sun. This is the best time of the year to view its rings (use binoculars or a telescope). **15**: Full Moon, also known this month as the Hunter's Moon. **26**: At 2:00 A.M., Standard Time returns; set clocks back one hour.

75 Years Ago

Joseph Fort Newton, writing in the October, 1922, issue of *The Atlantic Monthly*: "What is the great American sin? Extravagance? Vice? Graft? No; it is a kind of half-humorous, good-natured indifference,—a lack of 'concentrated indignation,' as an English friend described it,—which allows extravagance and vice to flourish. Trace most of our ills to their source, and it is found that they exist by virtue of an easy-going, fatalistic indifference which dislikes to have its comfort disturbed. . . . The most shameless greed, the most sickening industrial atrocities, the most appalling public scandals are exposed; but a half-cynical and wholly indifferent public passes them by with hardly a shrug of the shoulders; and they are lost in the medley of events. This is the great American sin, inviting the thunder and lightning of the wrath of God."



Illustrations by Doug Ross

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To Whale or Not to Whale

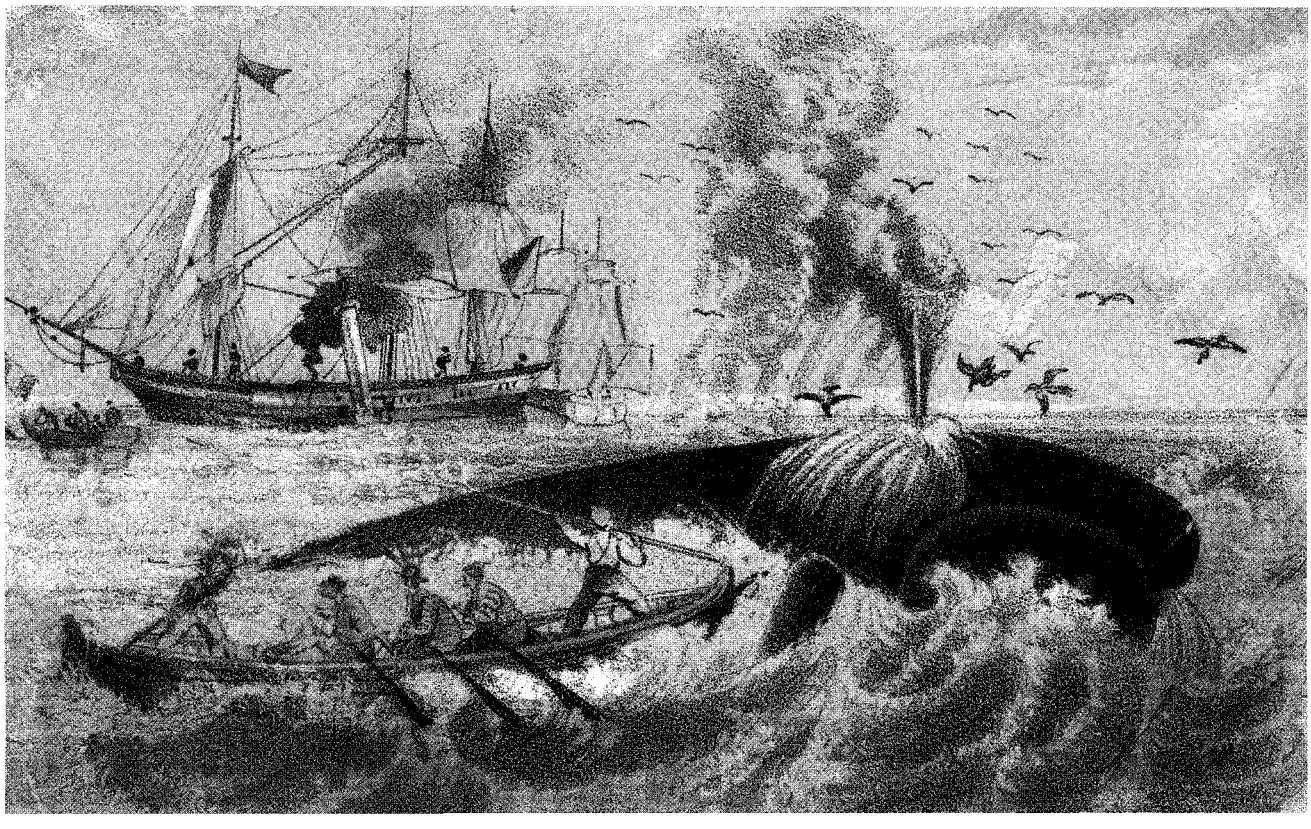
A controversy over subsistence and commercial hunting threatens to tear apart the International Whaling Commission and worsen the problem of illegal whaling

by Mark Derr

THE annual meeting of the International Whaling Commission this month in Monaco promises to be a contentious affair, as Japan and Norway renew their efforts to modify the eleven-year-old international moratorium on commercial whaling so that they can hunt minke whales without censure. In one sense the debate represents the continuation of a dispute, as old as the moratorium itself, over which if any whales can be hunted without the risk of extinction. And it exemplifies a broader issue that is bound to grow in importance as endangered and protected species recover and proliferate: What do we do with them? At stake is not just the fate of animals but also the long-term viability of the International Whaling Commission and other international covenants to protect endangered species.

Founded in 1946, the IWC represented an attempt to save the great whales from extinction brought on by human predation. The express purpose of the commission was "to provide for the proper conservation of whale stocks and thus make possible the orderly development of the whaling industry," now considered to include "humane harvesting." Among the IWC's thirty-nine members are the United States, the Russian Federation, England, Japan, Norway, Australia, and the People's Republic of China; a number of members have no whaling industry. Although the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) has sought to control international trade in a growing number of land and marine species since its creation, in 1973, the work of the IWC continues to be intensely scrutinized, in large part because of the mystique that has grown up in recent years around the intelligence of whales.

The fact is that for the first forty years of its existence the IWC did little more than preside over the decimation of the great whales—especially blue, right, humpback, fin, bowhead, sperm, and sei whales—by factory ships. Its own historians



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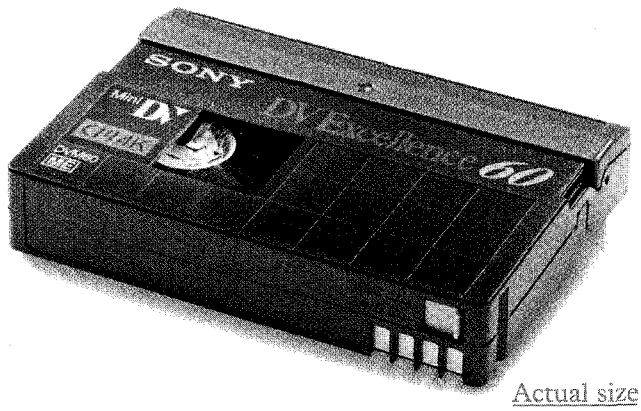

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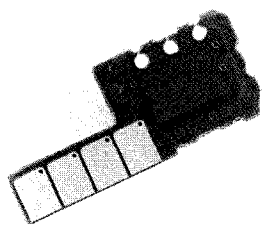

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attribute its failure during that period to greed on the part of whaling nations and to insufficient scientific knowledge. Not until the member nations of the IWC, under pressure from environmental groups and the public, approved a worldwide "pause"—a moratorium by another name—in commercial whaling, which took effect in 1986, did whale stocks (a stock is a population in a particular oceanic region) really begin to recover, some spectacularly. During that time Greenlanders, Alaskan Eskimos, native Siberians, and the people of St. Vincent and the Grenadines were allowed to continue subsistence whaling among specific stocks. Japan took minke whales, and the Soviet Union engaged in extensive illegal whaling for years, although the Russian Federation seems to have halted the practice for now. (The Soviets fed part of their aboriginal gray-whale kill to foxes that were being farmed for fur.)

In cultures celebrating the marketplace, how does one justify allowing some groups to whale but not others?

The pause became necessary in part because the IWC was using flawed scientific and technical methods to assess whale populations and set quotas, and also could not adequately inspect whaling ships, with the result that great whales were being driven toward extinction. During the moratorium IWC scientists came up with a "revised management procedure," which employs a delicate mathematical formula to set conservative quotas for whale hunters, based on population dynamics and uncertainty. For blue, right, and humpback whales, whose populations have not sufficiently recovered, those quotas continue to be zero. The populations of minke whales in the North Atlantic, the North Pacific, and the Antarctic, however, appear to be abundant enough to tolerate whaling under the plan, which is widely recognized as a fair and valid approach to the problem.

The Japanese, who claim to hunt whales for purposes of research, and the Norwegians, who formally objected to the moratorium in 1986 and thereby opted out of it (actions permitted under the terms of the convention establishing the IWC), very much want an officially sanctioned season on minke whales. By continuing to whale during the moratorium, they run the risk of boycotts organized by environmental groups or sanctions levied against them by IWC countries acting under domestic political pressure. To avoid becoming pariahs, they want the IWC to abide by the second part of its mandate and approve, for now, the hunting of minke whales.

Although the IWC adopted the revised management procedure in 1994, the commission refused to implement it, because doing so would end the moratorium. The official justification was that a comprehensive system of observation and inspection had to be developed before the new policy could take effect. A vote of three quarters of the thirty-nine participating nations is necessary for implementation of the revised management procedure, making it unlikely to happen any time soon. Many countries, including the United States, are opposed to the resumption of commercial whaling, although, paradoxically, the United States is also on record as favoring "science-based solutions" to global conservation issues. Like the United States, many other countries opposed to ending the moratorium have no incentive to whale commercially, and they wish to avoid incurring the wrath of voters, who largely support the ban. In an effort to resolve the issue of monitoring, the Norwegians have proposed that all whale meat be subjected to DNA tests, which can identify it by species, stock, and point of origin, and they have offered to fund the inspection.

The IWC currently permits subsistence whaling by aboriginal peoples but, with the collaboration of the national governments that rule them, mandates that they use the meat and blubber solely for local consumption. Alaskan Eskimos can, if they choose, barter bowhead-whale meat for other necessities but cannot sell it on the open market. Greenlanders are permitted by their government to sell the meat locally but not abroad. To many observers, these restrictions reek of imperialism and hypocrisy. By telling aboriginal peoples how they must act, the regulations help to perpetuate their disenfranchisement and impoverishment; a look at an Eskimo village reveals that money is probably what is most needed in this market economy.

Yet environmentalists fear that subsistence whaling opens the door to commercial whaling; indeed, the Makah Indians of Washington, who have not whaled in seventy years, plan to apply at this month's meeting for a quota of five gray whales. Reports are circulating that the Japanese and others interested in expanding hunting are attempting to persuade Indians in British Columbia who, like the Makah, no longer whale to resume their traditional practice. (Canada left the IWC in 1982, so its native peoples need no approval from that body.) Some Japanese and Norwegian groups can make a strong claim that they, too, merit aboriginal hunting rights, although their traditions involve the sale of meat and blubber to the commercial trade. In cultures that celebrate the absolute virtue of the marketplace, how does one justify policies allowing some groups to hunt whales but not others?

The controversy over subsistence and commercial whaling, tied as it is to the adoption of the revised management procedure and continuation of the moratorium, threatens to tear the IWC apart. Some observers believe that unless a way is found to permit commercial hunting of minke whales, the group will fail, and all manner of unregulated whaling will follow. Even if the IWC manages to maintain the status quo, abundant evidence exists that illegal whaling is a major problem that will worsen without a lifting of the moratorium and the establishment of strong international monitoring. Yet a number of national delegations and environmental groups argue that modifying the moratorium to any extent may bring about a broad resumption of whaling.

▪ ▪ ▪

Beyond the question of hunting lie others of equal importance. Although some stocks are recovering, others are not (especially Southern blue and North Atlantic right, and Eastern Arctic and Okhotsk Sea bowhead), leading some experts to suggest that the IWC or another group may have to implement mea-

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sures more extreme than a moratorium on hunting to bring those animals back. (Interestingly enough, the Bering-Chukchi-Beaufort bowhead population appears to be increasing despite continuous hunting by Alaskan Eskimos.) A number of whales, particularly those that travel in shipping channels or near shore, are at risk from fishing, offshore development, and collisions with ships. Last spring the National Marine Fisheries Service decided to require lobstermen in Maine and Massachusetts to change the lines they use on their pots because of the risk that the nearly extinct North Atlantic right whale, which rarely visits the Gulf of Maine, might be caught in the lines then being used and drown. In some parts of the world unregulated offshore oil-and-gas exploration is seen as a potential threat to whales. Drift nets catch whales and also dolphins, and should probably be restricted, but international free-trade agreements preclude a nation's acting unilaterally against another. In addition, some experts worry that whale watching has become so popular that the boats carrying tourists are disrupting the animals.

The broader issue of which the debate over the resumption of whaling is a part is just now gaining recognition, and causing consternation, in ecological circles. In Yellowstone National Park the bison herd, which is not hunted, has grown so large that it has destroyed the forage. Hungry bison recognize no human borders; they have moved out of the park and are being slaughtered for fear that they will infect cattle with brucellosis, which causes spontaneous abortions. (Wolves were recently reintroduced to Yellowstone, but whether they will thin out the population of bison remains to be seen; so far they seem more interested in elk.) In Florida the population of alligators has rebounded so completely that they have been removed from the endangered list and are now hunted. They are also seen as posing a threat to people and domesticated animals. With supposedly flourishing populations of elephants packed into game parks, southern African nations have successfully lobbied CITES for a weakening of the total ban on trade in ivory, although whether this presages a resumption of elephant hunting is unclear. In Antarctica seal populations have exploded as a result of an end to hunting and the demise of baleen whales, which competed with the seals for food. The result has been an ecological nightmare—soil erosion, loss of vegetation, and polluted freshwater. Along the northeastern coast of North America and in the Pacific Northwest swelling populations of seals and sea lions have been implicated in a decline of certain fish stocks, already diminished by human activities.

Considerable pressure exists to maintain bans on hunting whales, bison, elephants, seals, and sea lions (one might say all large mammals), so enamored have people become of such creatures after a quarter century of nature films and campaigning by animal-rights groups. Given the slaughter that occurred when those animals were hunted, the bans are not necessarily misguided. But they do raise questions about how or whether those burgeoning populations, which clearly can have a negative environmental impact, should be managed. Many people believe that the answer is that human beings must control the populations of those animals through some form of hunting, because the natural system in which they evolved no longer exists.

Countries interested in expanding whaling are urging Indians who no longer whale to resume the practice.

Continuing to protect certain species after they have recovered is detrimental to the ecology of a region when it creates imbalances. We may therefore have to accept responsibility for managing natural areas more intensively than we now do. Unfortunately, as many ecologists know, we lack the knowledge to do that, and political opposition to plans that involve hunting or culling is intense—yet we cannot afford to do nothing. These issues are bound to be contentious for years to come. For now, they trigger more emotion than rational debate.

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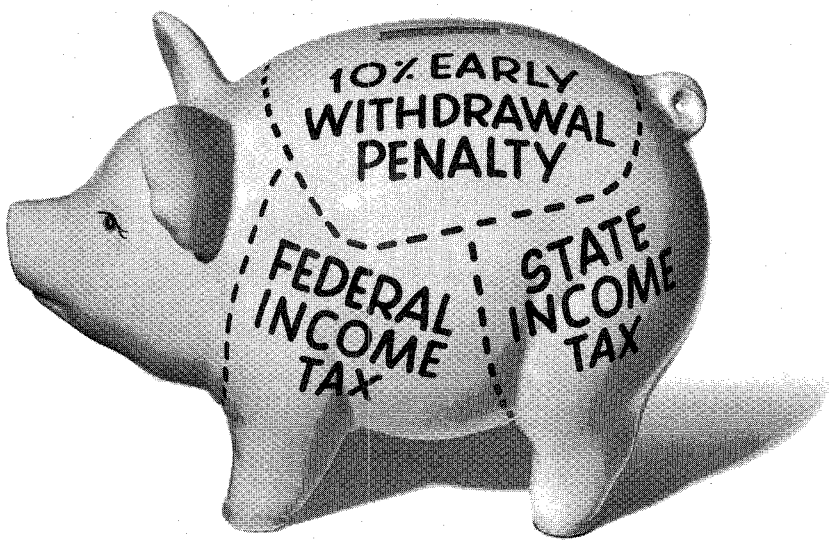

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Can the Government Prevent Divorce?

Researchers say that they can—and some states feel they should—reduce the likelihood of divorce by altering the course of bad marriages in the making

by Francine Russo

THE bride-to-be, a graphic designer, was forty years old and about to be married for the first time, to a businessman. At her pastor's suggestion, she and her fiancé filled out a questionnaire to measure the strengths and weaknesses of their relationship—165 questions on their personalities, backgrounds, values, and aspirations. How did you answer this question, she asked him in the car afterward. And this? And this? Before the ride home ended, they had broken their engagement.

Whenever Mike McManus, a religion columnist and the founder of Marriage Savers, an organization that works with churches to strengthen marriages, tells this story, audiences roar approval. This is a success story, he says, and the kind of thing we need more of: a process that will reveal any likelihood of long-term incompatibility, and thus spare would-be marriage partners the pain and expense of a seemingly inevitable divorce. Some others making war on the divorce rate do not favor such a test, but fervently endorse teaching basic marriage skills to all engaged couples.

The emotional, health, social, and economic costs associated with marital conflict and family dissolution—including delinquency, depression, poverty, and crime, and especially the devastating harm done to children—have been well documented. For some, the solution is to close the doors tighter on marriage through stricter divorce laws, as Louisiana has recently done by legislating "covenant" marriage as an option. Yet study after study indicates that children are damaged less by divorce per se than by exposure to intense conflict, whether their families are intact, dissolving, or broken.

The divorce crisis has thrown a spotlight on the field of marital research and education, which attacks domestic instability and unhappiness at its beginnings, before marriages deteriorate, or even before they start—though some programs can be used later to repair troubled marriages. The premarital questionnaire that broke up the graphic designer's engagement is just one tool in a psycho-educational arsenal that includes courses on communication, conflict resolution, and marriage enhancement. These tools are piquing the imagination of policymakers here and abroad. In the past year legislators in at least eleven states have considered whether such programs should be legally required or encouraged before marriage licenses are granted. The U.S. military is strongly encouraging married enlistees to attend marriage-education classes, and many members of the clergy nationwide are urging other pastors to use systematic premarital education for all engaged couples.

Over the past two decades government-funded researchers have declared that they can predict with about 90 percent accuracy which engaged couples will divorce. Other researchers have de-

Illustrations by Cornel Rubino

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SAPPHIRE MARTINI. AS CRAFTED BY STEPHEN DWECK.

OUR SOMETHING PRICELESS.

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veloped programs that, they say, can significantly change the odds for marriages that appear doomed. Since the advent of videotaping, in the 1970s, these social scientists have been able to observe and measure couples' interactions in the laboratory with greater and greater precision. The first university studies to emerge from this work compared distressed and nondistressed couples. The results demonstrated that the two groups communicated differently. Longitudinal studies followed, in which couples were observed regularly over a number of years to determine which behaviors were most predictive of divorce. An early researcher in the field—regarded by many as its reigning genius—is John Gottman, who presides over a high-tech couples lab at the University of Washington at Seattle.

The questionnaire that broke up the graphic designer's engagement is just one tool in a growing psycho-educational arsenal.

As a professor at Indiana University in the 1970s, Gottman began studying couples in his lab while they talked casually, discussed difficult issues, or tried to solve problems. Video cameras recorded every facial expression, gesture, and change of tone. Gottman was able to play back the videos for his subjects and ask them what they were feeling at particular moments.

Gottman has followed 658 couples, some for as long as fourteen years, some with more-intensive observation that monitors shifts in their heart rate and stress indicators in their blood and urine. Studying marriages in such minute detail, Gottman has been able to chart the effects of small gestures. Fairly early he discovered that when a spouse—particularly the wife—rolls her eyes while the other is talking, the marital EXIT sign is blinking fiercely. In fact, Gottman found that contempt, which is indicated by eye-rolling, is one of the four strongest divorce predictors—together with criticism, defensiveness, and stonewalling. Gottman calls them the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. In study after study these behaviors identified those who would divorce with a remarkable accuracy of greater than 90 percent.

While Gottman was working from observed interactions, the social scientist David Olson and his colleagues at the University of Minnesota were developing a written survey of couples' attitudes, backgrounds, and behavior styles. With this tool Olson could predict which couples would divorce with almost the same accuracy as Gottman. And statistical analysis of demographic data also uncovered factors associated with a high divorce rate, including marriage at an early age, education deficiency, low economic status, religious differences, and parental divorce.

While Gottman and his followers worked backward from the negative side, Olson reported positive but similar findings. Couples who stayed happily married, he found, scored higher in such categories as realistic expectations, communication, conflict resolution, and compatibility.

Some of the researchers differentiated between "static" factors, those they couldn't expect to modify, such as age and economic status, and "dynamic" factors, such as communication patterns, and they zeroed in on the latter. If they could change the predictors, could they also change the prediction? They thought so. And they hoped that if they could change patterns that people had learned from their families, they might even raise the odds for those who had experienced a parental divorce or a previous divorce of their own. Thus the stage was set for research-based marriage education.

Olson developed a program called PREPARE as a counseling tool for engaged couples, and, later, ENRICH, for married couples. Couples indicate agreement on a scale of one to five with 165 statements like the following: "I expect some of our romantic love will fade after marriage." "I can easily share my positive and negative feelings with my partner." "I have some concerns about how my partner will be as a parent."

PREPARE has grown in popularity with family counselors and in churches, where older "mentor couples" as well as the clergy are often trained to use it. The counselor gives the couple the written questionnaire, has it computer-scored in Minnesota, and then reviews the detailed report with the couple. During a few follow-up sessions the counselor uses prescribed exercises to help the couple develop skills in the categories in which their scores are low. If their scores are very low, they are gently urged to have additional counseling—and by some counselors to delay marriage. Olson is proud of the fact that, like the graphic designer and her fiancé, 10 to 15 percent of those who take PREPARE break their engagements.

While Olson was developing his questionnaire, Howard Markman, a graduate student working with Gottman in Indiana, was doing his own prediction studies and discovering other "danger signs"—for example, the tendency to escalate a conflict. Based on this research, Markman and Scott Stanley, now at the University of Denver, along with others developed PREP—the Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program. (Markman and Stanley, with Susan Blumberg, are the authors of *Fighting for Your Marriage*, first published in 1994.) PREP is a short course, usually given over one full day and two evenings, that provides tools for talking about important relationship issues without fighting. It also teaches skills for preserving the positive elements in a relationship, such as making sure that time is available for friendship and fun, when problems are *not* discussed.

PREP is only one of dozens of relationship-enhancement programs created in the past forty years. Relationship Enhancement, developed by Bernard Guerney Jr., a clinical psychologist and family therapist, had its beginnings in the late 1950s. This program and many others that grew up afterward—most notably PAIRS, developed by Lori Gordon, a marriage and family therapist, and the Couple Communication Program, developed by Sherod Miller, at the University of Minnesota—claim significant results and large followings. The programs differ in length and presentation—teaching is sometimes for individual couples but most often in a group or classroom setting. They range from eight to 120 hours, in a variety of

(Continued on page 38)

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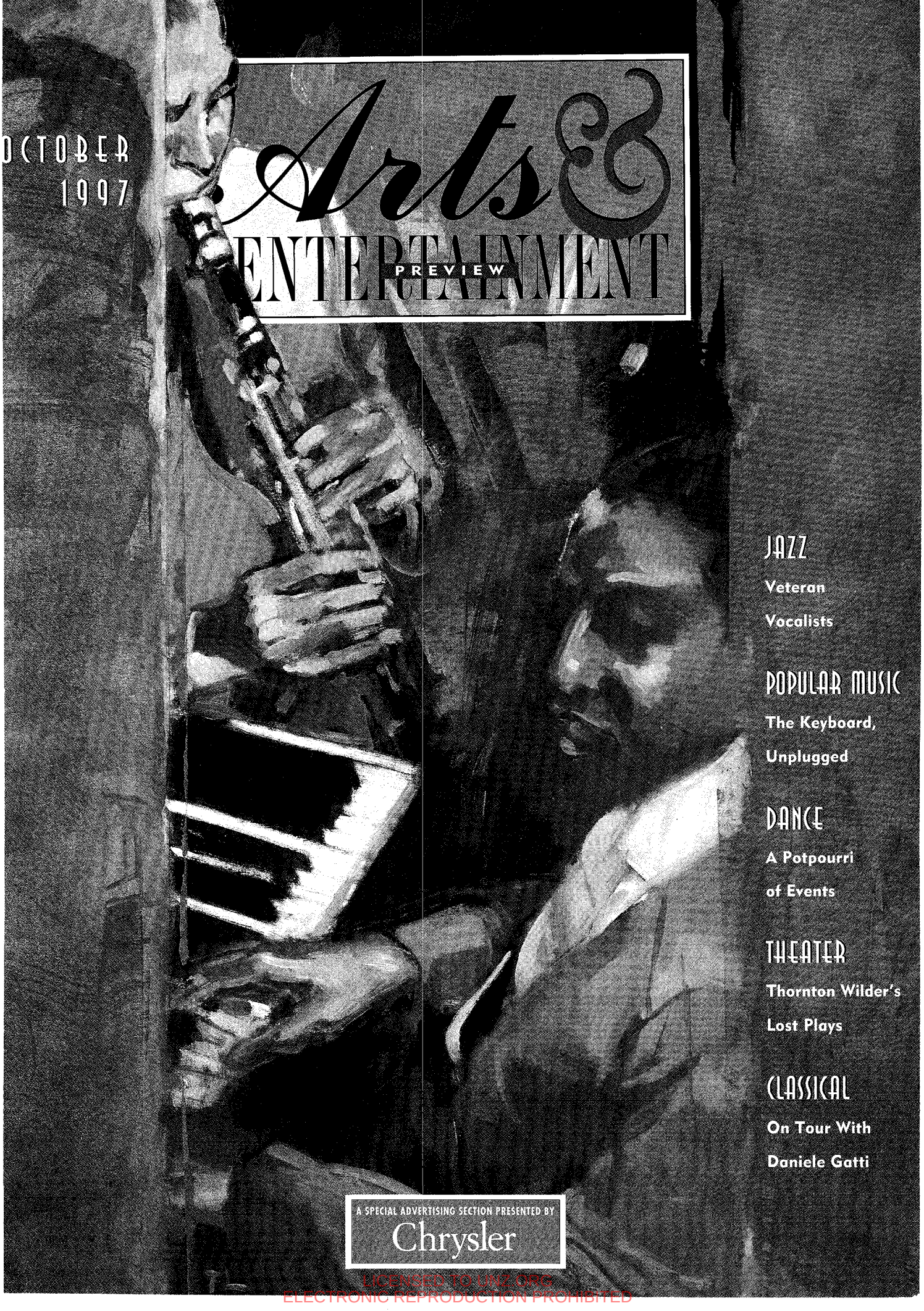
Arts & ENTERTAINMENT
PREVIEW



JAZZ
Veteran Vocalists

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The Keyboard, Unplugged

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Popular Music and Jazz

BY BOB BLUMENTHAL AND CHARLES M. YOUNG

THE LEE WAY

In this supposed age of electronica, it's rare to hear a keyboard that isn't connected to a bank of computers. On his debut album *Living It All Wrong* (Pure/Mercury), Lee Feldman plays just such a keyboard. It's called a piano, and with a minimum of accompaniment—drums, bass, occasional strings, a lonely clarinet suggestive of Gershwin—he plays it in just the dry, subtle, understated manner that his dry, subtle, understatedly hilarious songs call for. Drawing on cabaret and jazz more than on Jerry Lee Lewis, Feldman doesn't rock, exactly. His singing is reminiscent of Loudon Wainright III, Randy Newman, and Hamell on Trial. It's smart and vulnerable and has just enough energy to push the inflections but not so much that Feldman emotes anywhere his guardedly eccentric persona shouldn't emote.

JOANNE SAVIO

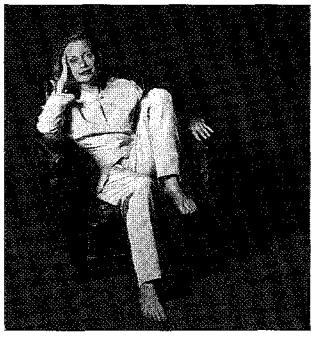
Feldman: singer, songwriter, and pianist

Exquisite snippets of stride piano open and close the album. The nine songs in which Feldman sings address the usual dysfunctional relationships with unusual humor and charm, with empathy, and without surrendering his own point of view. But what really seems to interest him is the subject of time. He likes lots of time, because he loves to reflect, to let the aesthetics of a situation just wash over him. Thus he prefers the peace of the suburbs to the tumult of the city and would rather think than rebel. He knows that ultimately we don't have much time at all: "You better have fun, 'cause it's over soon," he counsels in "Always Till Always," a paradoxical reflection on reincarnation. **—C.M.Y.**

Bob Blumenthal is a jazz critic for The Boston Globe.
Charles M. Young reviews popular music for Playboy, Musician, *and other publications.*

RESCUING THE VOICES OF COOL

There are no young lions among great jazz vocalists. The singer's art requires native talent and years of experience along with a sense of when and how to apply technique. Several young veterans have hit their singing stride recently. Kitty Margolis ranges from African chants to "in-crowd" camp on *Straight Up With a Twist* (Mad-Kat), and Count Basie alum Dennis Rowland abandons crossover efforts for modern balladry on *Now Dig This!* (Concord Jazz). Now Dominique Eade has released one of the year's most haunting and accomplished collections.



TOSHI KAZAMA

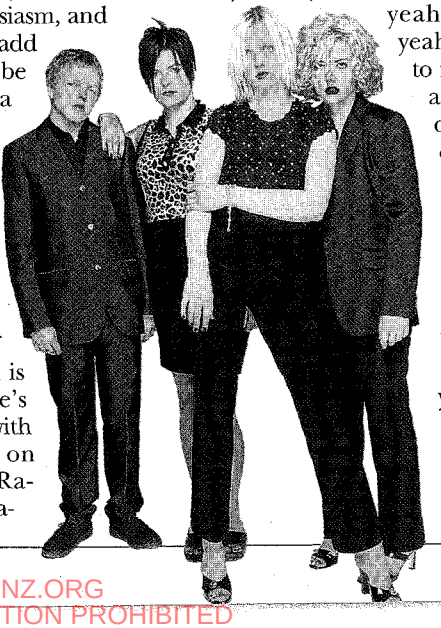
Dominique Eade

When the Wind Was Cool (RCA Victor), Eade's third album, is a bold and atmospheric tribute to June Christy and Chris Connor. These voices of cool, who sang with Stan Kenton's band in the 1940s and 1950s, introduced a subtle inflection to jazz vocals and popularized harmonically challenging material. Eade's rich voice, her effortless delivery, and the tasteful assurance with which she embellishes melodies make her sound totally at home with the vintage repertoire of Christy and Connor.

Much of this music is obscure, and Eade deserves credit for rescuing such tunes as "When the Wind Was Green" and "The Bad and the Beautiful." With a talented arranging team, she makes use of ten musicians in unusual small groupings, often putting guitar or vibes in the place of piano. Flute, bass clarinet, and frame drum add other dramatic touches. Excellent accompaniment, especially from Fred Hersch's piano and the tenor sax of the great Benny Golson, could easily have stolen the scene if not for Eade's commanding vocals. **—B.B.**

AN ORDER OF GIRL ROCK, HOLD THE SPICE

Appearing on The Children's Channel in England—a necessary credential for any rock-and-roll band coming out of the mother country these days—the members of Kenickie called the Spice Girls "Tory scum." The band consists of three girls (two on guitar and vocals and one on bass) and one boy (on drums), all twenty or under. They bring the advantages of youth to their album *At the Club* (Warner Bros.)—namely, energy, enthusiasm, and attitude, to which they add a forthright desire to be looked at and to make a lot of money. Yes, they really want to be rock stars, so they're in the right business. Should anyone else pay attention? Yes if your idea of girl rock is the Runaways and the Go-Go's. No if your idea of girl rock is Joni Mitchell. Kenickie's members bash away with contagious abandon on riffs worthy of the Ramones, with the occasional psychedelic interlude. True to the most hallowed tradition of punk rock, they denounce punk rock for conformity, for clichés, and for being self-righteous about low production quality—which makes them more punk than the punks they denounce in "Punka." Their hit single "In Your Car," which appears to compare the course of a relationship to the course of hitching a ride, has a hugely catchy chorus that goes "Yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah." It would be easy to ridicule such a lyric, as has often been done in the past, except for two caveats: Songs aren't about linear meaning, they're about creating a mood. And in the early sixties another band from England had a chorus that went "Yeah yeah yeah," and they are remembered a lot better now than their many critics. **—C.M.Y.**



ELAINE CONSTANTINE

COVER ILLUSTRATION BY FRANCIS LIVINGSTON

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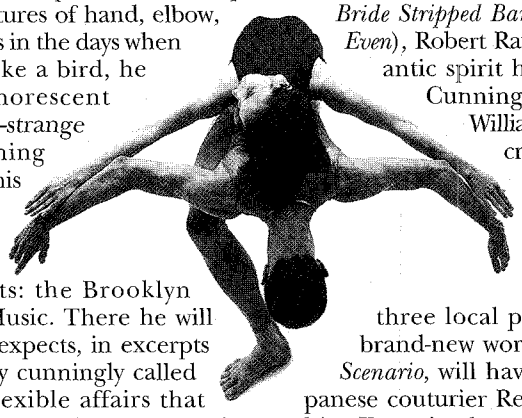
Dance and Theater

BY NANCY DALVA AND JOHN ISTEL

WHAM, BAM, THANK YOU CUNNINGHAM

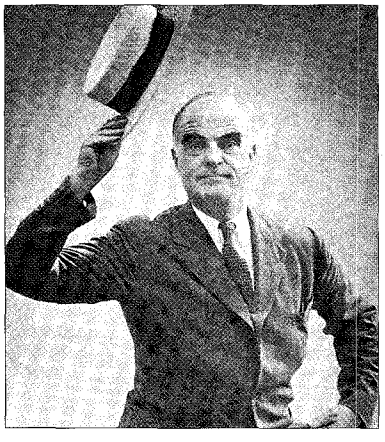
In his sixtieth year of performing, Merce Cunningham still takes to the stage with his customary relish. He will stand stock still and then, in a great flurry, mark up the air with rapid yet precise gestures of hand, elbow, eyebrow. Just as in the days when he could fly like a bird, he leaves phosphorescent trails behind—strange tracers, gleaming afterimages. This month finds him landing in one of his customary haunts: the Brooklyn Academy of Music. There he will perform, one expects, in excerpts from repertory cunningly called *BAMEvents*, flexible affairs that change from evening to evening, depending on—as it is ever with this, our grandest, our clearest-minded, our most visionary choreographer—his whim. From night to night the *BAMEvents* scenery will change too, offering a chance to see historic decor by Andy Warhol (magical floating silver pillows), Jasper Johns (a transcendently wonderful set that deconstructs Duchamp's *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even*), Robert Rauschenberg (whose antic spirit has long enlivened Cunningham's stages), and William Anastasi (whose cryptic means match the choreographer's own), among others. All this is in addition to a repertory that offers three local premieres and one brand-new work. This last, called *Scenario*, will have decor by the Japanese couturier Rei Kawakubo. Takehisa Kosugi, whose recent work with Cunningham involved a set of glass bells, quite lovely and eerie, will do the score. *Installations* is a complex, technically oriented work incorporating multiple video monitors. The other dances are *Rondo*, which changes from performance to performance, depending on last-minute casting choices made, and the luminous *Windows*, named for the computer program, and making use of the same opportunities for spacing, overlapping, sizing, and such. The dance contains a brief, buoyant solo for Tom Caley that looks like youth itself in all its springtime glory. What else would one now expect from Cunningham, golden in years, young as tomorrow? (October 14–19; 718-636-4100.) **—N.D.**



CHRIS CALLIS

THE WIZARD AND MR. WILDER

America's cultural Age of Innocence reached its zenith in the late 1930s with two artistic bonbons: MGM's technicolor treatment of *The Wizard of Oz* and Thornton Wilder's more haunting voicing of the mantra "no place like home," *Our Town*. This month Kentucky's renowned Actors Theatre of Louisville (502-584-1205) re-examines each of these cultural icons in a festival of symposia, exhibitions, documentary screenings, and performances. ATL has declared October 18 "Oz Day" in conjunction with its musical production of *The Wizard of Oz* (sans Roseanne, alas). Then, starting on October 29, the company makes Wilder the subject of its annual "Classics in Context" festival, coinciding with the centenary of his birth. The centerpiece will be the debut of four never-before-produced Wilder one-acts, directed by Tazewell Thompson.



Hats off to the new Wilder one-acts

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In these playlets—which languished among Wilder's uncompleted manuscripts until recently, when they were published by Theatre Communications Group—the dark shadow that was so easy to sentimentalize in the author's earlier work flutters closer. Wilder's optimism has waned; his irony is bared. But his characters are still preoccupied with the getting of wisdom. In *Youth*, Gulliver, at the ripe age of forty-six, is cast ashore amid islanders who kill anyone over thirty. You can hear the author's voice when the character concludes, "Humanity is the last thing that will be learned by man; it will not be learned from the young." Small jewels, the plays offer a rare chance to hear anew from an American literary elder. **—J.I.**

Nancy Dalva is the author of Dance Ink: The Photographs.
John Istel is a senior editor at Stagebill.

MATERIAL GIRL

Imagine if the turn-of-the-century impresario David Belasco produced *Jackie*. Instead his name simply adorns the Broadway theater into which Gip Hoppe's comedy careens on October 18. Infatuated with using real stuff onstage, Belasco famously imported Carolina mud for one production. The opening scene of Hoppe's satire on the life and times of Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis is set at the recent Sotheby's auction of Jackie's household goods—and those props would have depleted Belasco's fortune. Luckily, Hoppe knows the value of fake pearls. His barbed burlesque, produced to acclaim in Boston last year, employs an octet of actors—along with a phalanx of puppets and cardboard cutouts—to portray more than 100 characters. Reviewers seemed relieved to find that when the curtain descended on the comic chaos, the former First Lady's reputation hadn't been lowered as well. Hoppe saved his sharpest satire for Jackie's Kennedy in-laws, Marilyn Monroe, other assorted hangers-on, and us Jackie-obsessed observers. "She paid an enormous price for her fame," the playwright told one interviewer. "Now it's somebody else's turn to pay for it." All Jackie Onassis idolizers should recognize their cue and line up for tickets (212-239-6200).**—J.I.**

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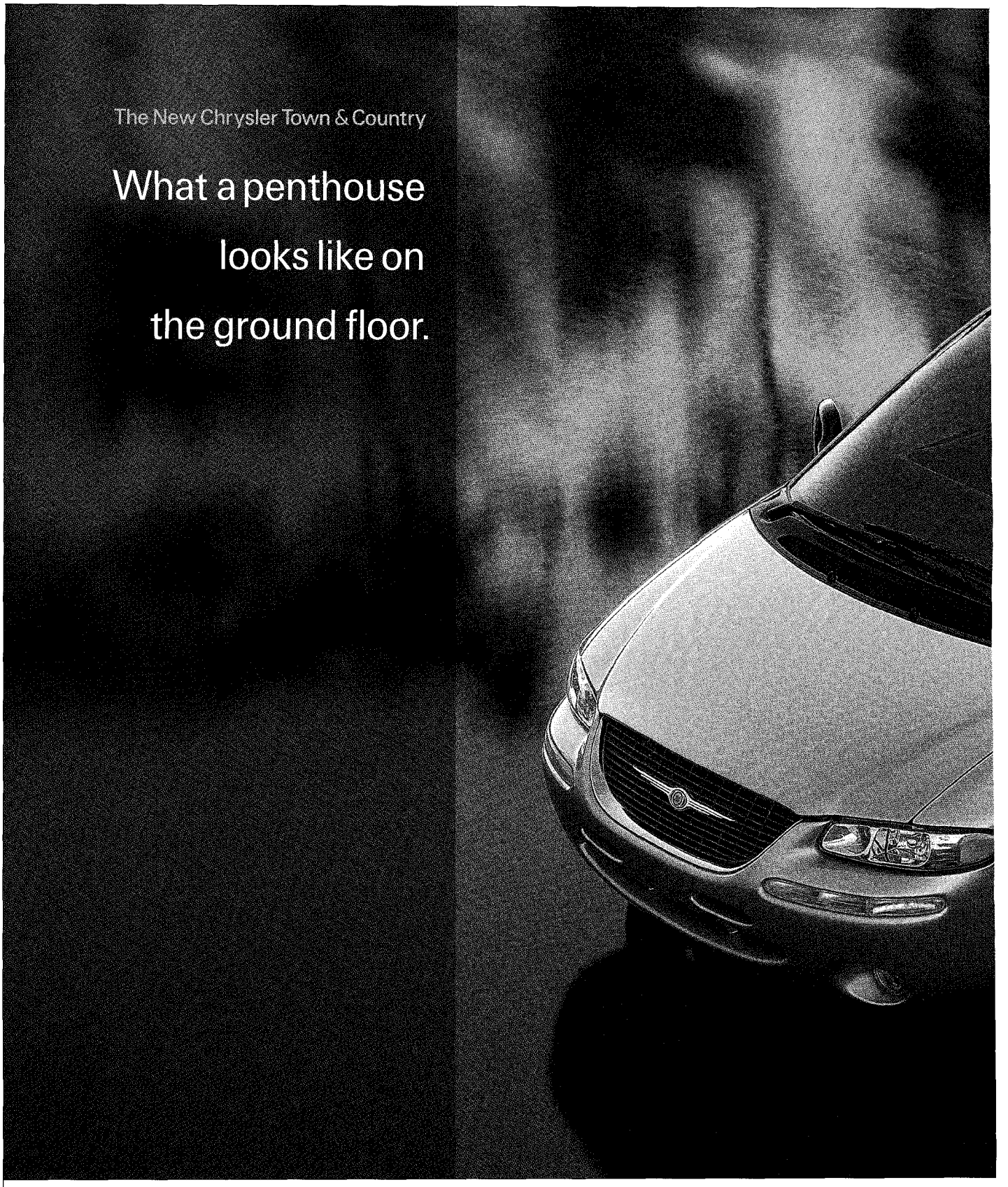

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Classical Music

BY AUSTIN BAER

THE REAL THING

A topic in search of a doctoral candidate: the popularization of classical music by the movies. Disney's immortal *Fantasia* peopled Beethoven's Symphony No. 6 (the *Pastoral*) with centaurs and she-centaurs and gave Mickey Mouse a star turn as the Sorcerer's Apprentice in the brilliant Dukas tone poem. The elegiac Andante from Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 21, K. 467 set the tone for *Elvira Madigan*, as did the volcanic opening flourish of Richard Strauss's tone poem *Thus Spake Zarathustra* for *2001*. *Shine*, which treats musical performance as blood sport, has established Rachmaninoff's lush Piano Concerto No. 3 in the popular imagination as an Olympic event—and also the

ERICH HARTMANN

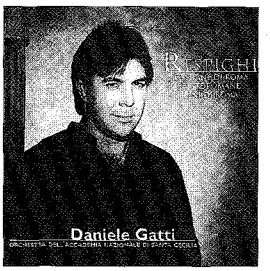
Garrick Ohlsson's turn to shine

personal property of the tormented Australian pianist David Helfgott, who at this late stage in his career does not command the technique to play it. His American tour last spring sold out, but if the concerto rather than the human-interest angle was what you cared about, the performance to hear was the one by the lithe young Norwegian virtuoso Leif Ove Andsnes, with the New York Philharmonic. His reading (also available on an EMI CD) balanced the scales between poetry and heroics, pinning swirling galaxies of notes into coherent shapes by means of the subtlest accents. To judge from the tumultuous ovations, no one in the hall missed the will-he-crash melodrama of the simultaneous *Shine* tour. This month "Rach 3" resurfaces on a program by the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra. The soloist is Garrick Ohlsson, an American artist whose Paul Bunyanesque physicality bespeaks his power but belies his delicacy. It may not be movie material, but the music should be thrilling. And thanks to the movie, a much expanded public will be flocking to it.

MICHAEL LUTCH

ROME IS WHERE THE HEART IS

Times have changed. A generation ago a blazing new talent like Daniele Gatti—born in Milan in 1960, currently the music director of London's Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Bologna's Teatro Communale, and Rome's Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia—would long since have been snapped up for a major recording contract. In today's cautious climate he has had to wait, to be signed at last not by an old blue chip but by hungry young Conifer Classics. Gatti's debut album (disserved by a drab, shifty-eyed cover portrait) presents Ottorino Respighi's ever-popular *Pines of Rome*, *Fountains of Rome*, and *Roman Festivals*, played by the Santa Cecilia. Delivered with such flair, these splashy crowd-pleasers are hard to resist. But there is much more to Gatti than surface dazzle, and his first tour at the head of the Royal Philharmonic concerns itself chiefly with the serious business of Schubert, Schumann, Mahler, and Bartók. From October 11 to November 2 Gatti and the RPO visit New York, Washington, Boston, San Francisco, and thirteen other American cities. Precious little Respighi is scheduled, but there are always encores, for which a burst of Roman fireworks is just the ticket.



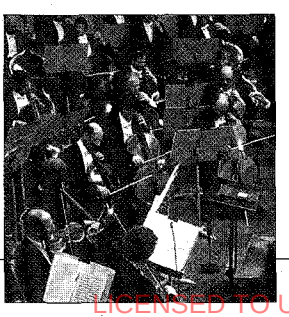
KARL GRANT

Austin Baer is a writer based in New York.

GENIUS, IN DUE TIME

In the pantheon of music's living masters Henri Dutilleux, born in France in 1916, has few peers. You would not, however, call him prolific. His apprentice pieces he has destroyed, staking his reputation on a handful of major works completed since the Second World War—works remarkable for their unpredictable yet organic sense of form and for their unorthodox interplay of single instrumental voices against the density of orchestral mass. *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* describes Dutilleux in terms more befitting a testimonial than a reference work: "He remains attentive to the most diverse musical trends, but rejects anything which might distract him from his own ideas and sensibility; each new work represents a deepening of his thought, an attempt to go further. Yet the guiding principles remain always the same, making Dutilleux's art a shining example of diversity within unity." Such a composer is not a man to be rushed. Thus Seiji Ozawa and the Boston Symphony Orchestra were forced in a recent season to postpone Dutilleux's latest major contribution, *Mémoire des ombres* (*Memory of shadows*), which now receives its world premiere in Boston (October 9, 10, 17, 18; 617-266-1200), bookending the New York premiere by the same forces at Carnegie Hall (October 15, 16; 212-247-7800). The wait has only sharpened the anticipation.

Dutilleux at the BSO



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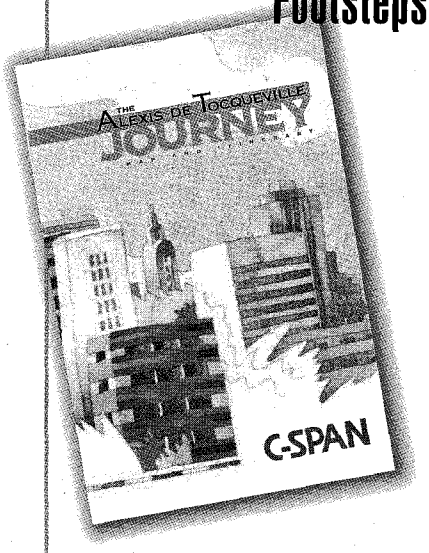

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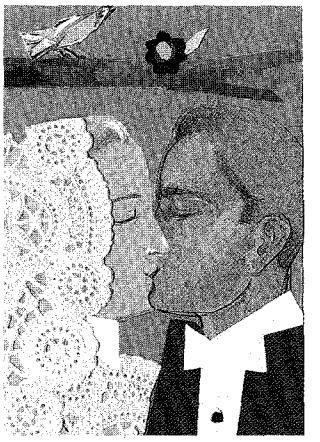
(Continued from page 30)
formats. But they have similar goals and teach similar skills. Most use neither questionnaires nor tests.

All these programs teach some version of "active listening" to help couples discuss difficult issues. Spouses take turns speaking, and must stick to one topic and express feelings without assigning blame or name-calling. The listener paraphrases what has just been said until the speaker agrees that he or she has been understood. Either can call a time out, and a specific time is set to continue. This technique seems to have the power to transform a couple's communication.

BUT what is the evidence that these programs really prevent divorce? The most complete government-funded research has been done on PREP. In one large-scale study in Denver 12 percent of couples who had taken PREP had broken up, separated, or divorced after five years, as had 36 percent of couples who had not taken it. In a recent study in Germany only four percent of PREP couples had separated or divorced after five years, as compared with 24 percent of couples who received traditional counseling or no preparation at all. These and other studies also indicate that in the first five years after marriage PREP couples reported more marital satisfaction, less negative and more positive communication, and lower levels of physical aggression.



After twelve years, however (the longest time that any of these programs has been studied), the Denver PREP group had a separation or divorce rate of 19 percent and the control group had a rate of 28 percent—a difference that the researchers regarded as not statistically significant.

Nevertheless, those who have seen the devastation of divorce firsthand—researchers, marriage educators, therapists, and members of the clergy—are increasingly eager to deliver their insights to the millions of couples they see as being at risk. Nearly 700 of these believers gathered last May at the first conference of the Coalition for Marriage, Family and Couples Education, where marriage educators were to teach their skills to other professionals and to the public.

THE ballroom of the Sheraton National Hotel, in Arlington, Virginia, was packed as Diane Sollee, a former marital therapist and the conference organizer, welcomed the attendees.

All the presenters and many of the attendees knew how fervently Sollee has worked for her cause—for couples education to stop marital unhappiness before as well as after it becomes corrosive. Sollee favors the "not" therapy: not expensive, not intrusive, not threatening, not stigmatizing—teaching skills primarily in a group or classroom setting. Research shows, Sollee points out, that most couples wait six years after sensing a problem before they enter therapy. By then only 20 percent of them can be helped in any lasting way. And most couples won't go for therapy at all.

Howard Markman, PREP's founder, gave the first night's address. Rallying the crowd about the pressing need for communication and conflict-management skills, he asserted, "Mismanaged conflict predicts both marital distress and negative effects for children." Though other factors can also predict divorce, he asserted, destructive conflict is both the most predictive and the most changeable, and over time destructive behavior patterns become more and more damaging.

The next morning John Gottman gave a much-anticipated speech. Declaring him "the rock upon which we build," Sollee reeled off some of Gottman's publications, accomplishments, and awards: more than twenty books, nearly a hundred papers, the NIMH Merit Award, the Distinguished Research Scientist award of the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy, and on and on.

Taking the podium, Gottman announced that he had re-examined the body of his work and had discovered

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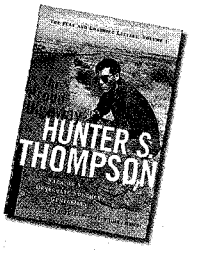

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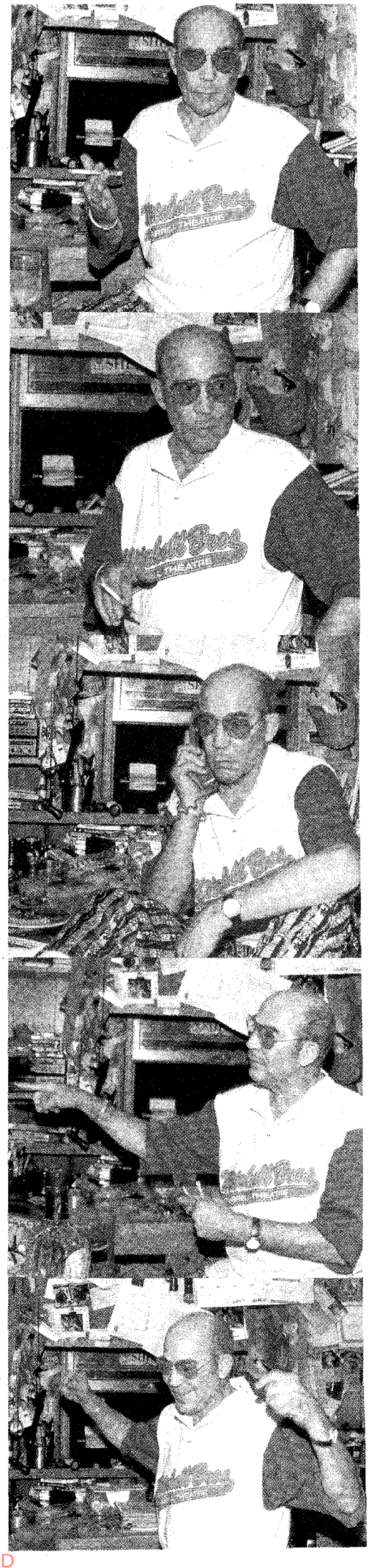

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something that had shaken him to his foundations. "Interventions"—the programs used by every expert present—haven't done a good enough job of helping couples. Knowing what is dysfunctional in a marriage just isn't enough. Researchers must also study what works well in successful marriages.

Most popular interventions, he continued, rest on the premise that marital happiness depends on the way couples solve problems and resolve conflicts through good communication. *"Wrong,"* he declared. In his firsthand observations of couples, they never do solve their problems. Happy couples have problems, and they tend to have exactly the same problems several years later. In the lab they seem as if they've just changed their hairstyles and clothes and come back into the same conversation. What distinguishes them from unhappy couples is that they develop a "dialogue" about their perpetual problems, trying to effect what change they can with humor and affection while at the same time accepting their partners as they are.

Especially wrongheaded, Gottman said, is the focus on empathy and active listening in resolving conflicts—the model that "forms the basis of most complex multi-component marital treatments of *all* theoretical orientations, including behavior therapy, systems approaches, and object-relations theory." For more than twenty years Gottman has watched happy couples interact. His finding? They do not employ active listening and empathy during conflict.

The active-listening model might work if people could really do it, but, Gottman said, shaking his head, it's just too hard to be an empathic, active listener when somebody is criticizing or attacking you. "I have seen the Dalai Lama do this," he joked, "and I am sure that Jesus and the Buddha did this, and that Moses did not do this."

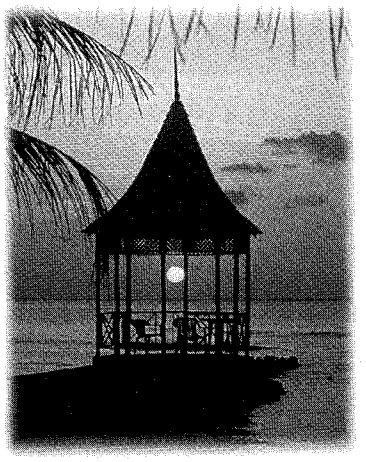
Gottman's presentation frustrated many at the conference, who point out that he himself has never tested any marriage program. And, Markman says, Gottman is wrong in asserting that active listening is *the* cornerstone of programs like PREP. "In PREP," he says, "active listening is only one of four or five cornerstones and is designed to counteract the danger signs that predict divorce and marital distress." In dismissing active listening, Gottman seemed to be challenging a major foundation of the work of nearly every expert at the conference, including Markman, whom he refers to as his former "student" ("collaborator," Markman says). In fact, in several conversations with me Gottman appeared to be unacquainted with the specifics of several major programs. Moreover, his own work indicates that happy couples have less negative communication.

I appealed to Gottman after his presentation, when we talked in the lobby of the Sheraton National: "The research says these programs work, right?" "The research sucks," Gottman replied. "The sampling is inadequate and unscientific. It's skewed because the people who took PREP, for example, were different from those who refused it."

Yet the PREP research, government-funded and highly regarded, like Gottman's own, found PREP to be associated with significantly lower divorce rates and greater marital satisfaction after five years. "*Every* program does better than the control group," Gottman insisted. The five major programs studied, he said, all show that after two years 30 to 50 percent of the couples in the program had significantly greater marital satisfaction than those in the control group.

But if 30 to 50 percent of couples can be helped . . . ? "It's a placebo effect," Gottman said. Surely these programs go beyond a placebo? In all of them couples do something together, invest in it together, and communicate in some constructive way. Maybe that's what improves their marriages. "No," Gottman said flatly. One of these programs teaches a kind of quid-pro-quo trading that has been associated with the most dysfunctional marriages, he said. Yes, bitter couples do tote up competing tabs.

JAMAICA



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But what if this bartering system is introduced to a happy couple? Can't it be an effective method for learning each other's needs? "Yes," Gottman concedes. "This could be right."

No system, however, works for everybody, Gottman said. Antisocial or borderline personalities, chronic depressives, psychotics, incest and child-abuse survivors, all require different methods. What we need is to test different kinds of interventions with larger, more inclusive, more scientific samples. "My hunch," Gottman said, "is that seventy percent of couples could be helped in some way, so that they wouldn't divorce but would be meaningfully improved in marital satisfaction—move up from unhappy to at least okay." He took out a ruled pad and scrawled down figures. He would need 10,000 couples, varying in ethnic, racial, educational, and economic background, and in degree of pathology. He would do a matching random survey of couples who did not volunteer, paying them for their responses over time. The study would be administered at five or six major universities around the United States by the best researchers in the marital field. He began listing them, and after a pause he jotted down at the bottom "Markman."

Gottman has followed some couples by monitoring shifts in heart rate and stress indicators in blood and urine.

Gottman would divide the couples into groups and test programs that varied in time and expense. In one, perhaps, he would teach only active listening. After two years he would measure lasting change or relapse. For those who had relapsed or experienced no change, he would test different kinds of marital therapy and possibly booster sessions for skills. Other couples would receive skills training or therapy at major marital stress points: when a first child was three months old, after the birth of a second child, when the first reached the teen years.

Howard Markman spotted us in the lobby and sat down at our table. Though I had heard that these two do not speak, they now exchanged small talk. Markman asked Gottman for a colleague's phone number and whipped out a computer address book in which to enter it. Gottman, obliging, thumbed through his tiny, taped-up, scratched-over leatherette book.

Markman threw himself into helping to design the model study under discussion. For national clinical trials with 10,000 couples, the men agreed, they would need $10 million a year for five years. Of course they were enthusiastic.

Can one realistically expect the federal government to fund a $50 million, five-year study to test marriage interventions? The Administration currently spends $33 million a year on another kind of model intervention program—Community-Based Resource Centers, under the auspices of the Department of Health and Human Services, which test interventions to help children at risk of abuse. This program directly assists families while it helps the government to discover the best interventions. Another program, Head Start, started small more than thirty years ago and demonstrated its ability to mitigate the effects of poverty on children. It is now funded at $4 billion annually.

With the costs of divorce now estimated to be in the billions annually, doesn't a modest investment in divorce reduction make sense? The British government is financing a small pilot program, which began this year, to test a variety of marriage-strengthening programs—from skills education to psychotherapy to telephone hot lines. Backed by a campaign to increase both public awareness of and access to marriage-support programs, it is also trying to encourage participation by churches, schools, health organizations, and employers. Though at $800,000 its cost is low, the program represents a clear stand by the government.

EVEN where our state legislators have taken a clear stand, they've been undemanding, asking couples only to learn a few relationship skills that take less time than a course in driver's ed. Most of their bills are innocuous. In Maryland and Michigan proposed laws prescribe a delay in granting licenses to couples who are unwilling to take marriage-skills classes. Alaska and Kansas are considering reducing the fee for a license as an inducement to take such classes. A bill in Missouri for an outright mandate died in committee earlier this year.

So far no bill has beaten back the forces of opposition: conservative Christians, civil libertarians, even many leaders of the psycho-education movement themselves. These last worry that a government bureaucracy is a poor delivery vehicle for their precious cargo. In addition, many who favor premarital education are members of the clergy. Marriage is religion's turf, they say: government, keep out. Scott Stanley, who has developed a Christian version of PREP, says, "I can easily imagine the eventual development of a state board that would govern the practice of premarital education, ultimately dictating what messages couples are to receive."

Stanley believes that churches should do any mandating. He favors programs like Mike McManus's Marriage Savers, which enlists members of the clergy and officials in a given community to support marriage in a variety of ways, including training older mentor couples to give premarital education to engaged couples. McManus offers statistics to show that these initiatives have reduced divorce significantly in seven out of eight cities that have adopted them and for which numbers are available.

The emphasis on prevention that has influenced so much thinking about modern medicine is now making more and more sense in the social sciences. Preventing unhappy, destructive marriages is much cheaper—in dollars and in human misery—than attempts to clean up the toxic waste that follows them.

What is it worth spending to make 30 percent of marriages happier? Or 50 percent? Or even 70 percent? Researchers may continue to quibble over statistics and theory, but for every child born in a successful marriage, statistically one more adult enters the marriage pool with a behavioral advantage. That child, multiplied again and again, can begin to reduce the dimensions of our divorce crisis.

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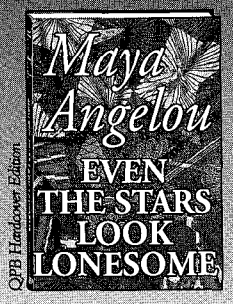

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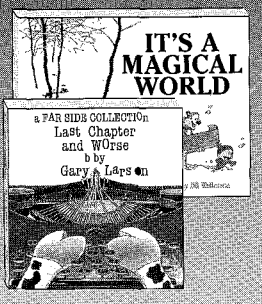

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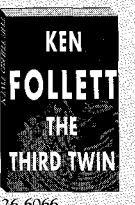

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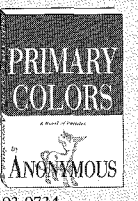

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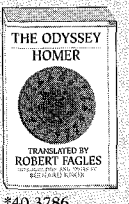

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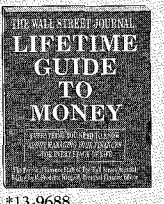

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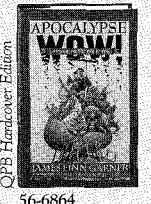

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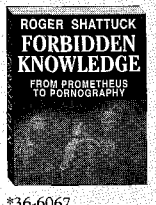

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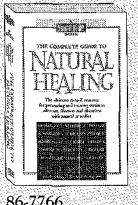

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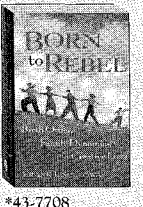

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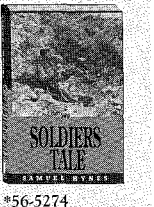

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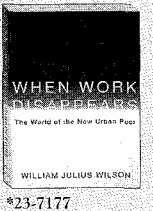

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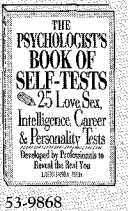

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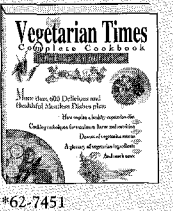

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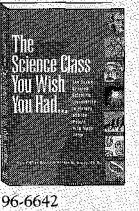

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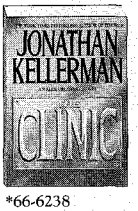

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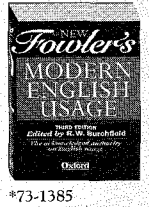

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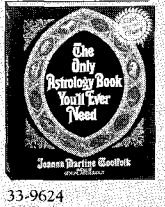

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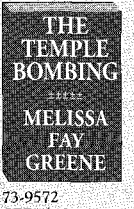

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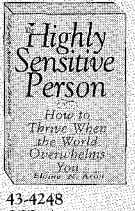

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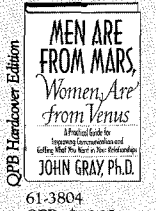

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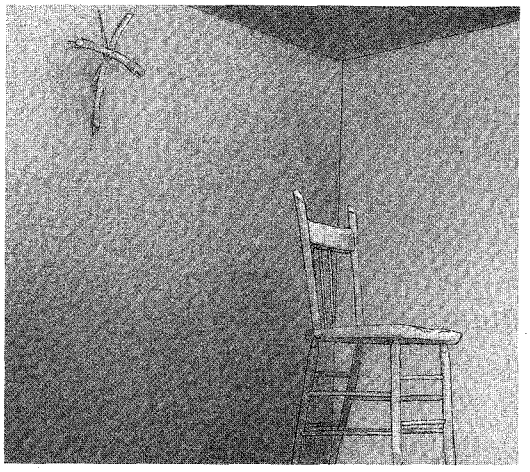

The Music of Silence

A portrait of an unlikely monk—a former concert pianist, once legendary in Paris for his talent, looks, and charm . . .

by Phyllis Rose

I MARRIED into an extraordinary family. Laurent's father was Jean de Brunhoff, the author and illustrator of the Babar books I loved so much as a child. Laurent and his brother Mathieu, barely a year younger than he, now a beloved pediatrician in Paris, were the little boys for whom the story of Babar was invented, by their mother, Cécile. The boys told their mother's wonderful story to their father, a painter, and asked him to illustrate it, which he did, writing a text and slightly modifying the story his wife had told—adding, for example, the Old Lady. That is uncanny, because Madame de Brunhoff, my mother-in-law, although she was young at the time and looked nothing like the Old Lady, has come more and more to resemble the woman her husband drew in 1931, as though he could imagine her changing in time, like those computer projections of lost children. Jean de Brunhoff died of tuberculosis when he was thirty-seven, leaving his widow with three small boys. Laurent was twelve, Mathieu eleven, and Alain almost three. Alone, never remarrying, Madame de Brunhoff got them through the war and brought them up. She was a pianist and taught at the Ecole Normale de Musique.

Laurent inherited his father's talent and became a painter, living the classic student-artist's life in a studio in Montparnasse until, at the age of twenty-one, he resurrected Babar and began to write and illustrate books about the lovable elephant—at least in part, he says, as a way of resurrecting his father and continuing imaginatively the family life of his childhood. Few readers were aware of any change in the authorship of the Babar books, partly because the war had intervened to explain any gap, and partly because Laurent had trained himself so well to draw elephants in the style of his father.

Alain inherited his mother's musical talent and, initially trained by her, became a concert pianist, well known in France in the 1960s. By the time I met Laurent, Alain was legendary in Paris for his talent, looks, and charm, and the glamorous life he had led before abruptly retiring from the world and becoming a monk at the age of forty.

Laurent and I visited Alain in the summer of 1990, some years after Alain had left his monastery outside Bordeaux for a hermitage in the Pyrenees. It was remote, but not as remote as I had imagined it, my idea of hermits dating back to the time of Saint Jerome. I envisioned them living on columns in the desert or hauling supplies in baskets up by ropes to their hand-hewn caves, whereas Alain lived on the grounds of a convent in a special bungalow enclave built for hermits, and he could have visitors.

Laurent and I, who were having a late honeymoon in Provence, drove down to see him in an air-conditioned BMW that from the figures Avis gave him, Laurent had somehow imagined was no more expensive to rent than a Ford Escort. From Avignon it was about two hours on the highway that runs by Nîmes, Montpellier, and Perpignan, along the route that the Romans pioneered and that countless tourists now follow on their way to Spain. We traveled at 90 mph the whole way, not feeling the speed, with *Così fan tutte* on the stereo. Only Mercedes, other BMWs, and very aggressive little R5s and Peugeot 205s failed to move out of our way. At the last exit in France we left the autoroute and headed toward the high peaks of the Pyrenees. Soon, following Alain's directions to the mountain hamlet near which he lived, we were in desolate country, covered with scrub and stunted oaks. The whole mountainside had burned a few years before, but the dense underbrush was already back.

Alain said he would wait for us on the road, and as we came up over a rise at the appointed hour, we saw him walking toward us. He was dressed not in the brown burlap hermit garb I was stupidly expecting but in ordinary corduroy pants and a green cotton shirt, and, like us, wore sandals. A figure recognizably of Laurent's family, handsome, elegant, Parisian, he looked out of place in that wilderness. I had to swallow tears. Loving him from my first glimpse of him through the windshield, I felt an immediate and wrenching sense of loss, something like the grief of mourning, and found it hard to bear that

Illustration by David Johnson

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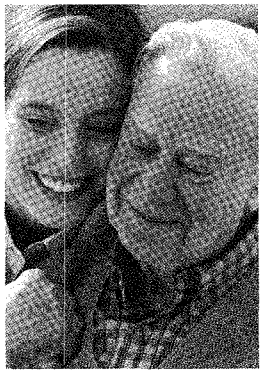

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he had chosen to sequester himself this way. I could only imagine how much more strongly this grief was felt by those who knew him better.

We took him to our hotel for lunch and talked all through the meal and for hours after, waiting for the heat of the day to abate before going back to his hermitage. Then we talked more. In all, we spent seven hours talking that day, beginning with appreciation of our car and other reassuringly worldly matters. Gradually Alain began to talk about himself. Although he lived almost entirely in silence and secrecy, he wanted to explain how he had come to where he was in life, understanding that there would not be many chances for us to meet and get to know each other.

HIS had been a lonely childhood. Alain was almost three when his father died, so he did not even have memories of him. Madame de Brunhoff rarely talked about Jean. While Alain was growing up, she was distant, absorbed in her music and in her grief. His brothers and cousins, almost a decade older, seemed to belong to a different generation.

As a gifted musician, he moved into a world of performers and connoisseurs. At the precocious age of fifteen he was already leading a sophisticated, worldly life, and by the time he was eighteen, he had had enough of it and wanted solitude. He went to live alone in the country, where he stayed for four years before resuming his highly social existence. For the next ten years Alain became increasingly well known as a pianist, giving concerts, making recordings. Like his mother, he taught at the Ecole Normale de Musique.

Then a distressing event interrupted the momentum of his life: a house he had lived in and used for storage burned. The fire destroyed the family souvenirs that meant so much to him, including many of his father's paintings, his grandfather's memoirs, and all his music. It shook him profoundly. It was, he said, his first shedding, his first deprivation; he used the word *dépouillement*, which means "the skinning of an animal."

In his turmoil he had no religion to turn to. His father had been Protestant and his mother, though technically Catholic, really believed only in music. Still, an object that meant a great deal to Alain was his father's Bible. He took it with him everywhere and looked through it frequently. Jean had underlined heavily in places. One day, looking through the New Testament, Alain found a passage that had been underlined so often that the paper was nearly falling apart. It struck him in that moment that his father had really believed, that these words in the Gospel had been important to him.

Around that time a woman he knew died suddenly at the age of forty. Her husband was a very religious man, and Alain was struck by the funeral he arranged. There was grief, of course, but there was also a beautiful faith, serenity, and acceptance. As time went by and his thoughts turned more to religion, he had no one to talk to. He got in touch with the husband of the woman who had died, and the man recommended that Alain speak to the priest who had conducted the funeral service. They met a couple of times, and then the priest announced that he was leaving for vacation in Brittany. Easter was coming. The priest suggested that Alain come to Brittany and take his first communion there. He knew a Trappist monastery at which Alain could stay.

Alain liked that monastery in Brittany so much that he almost became a Trappist monk, which would have meant never seeing his family or talking to anyone outside the monastery again. Eventually he decided against it, in part because Trappist life is too communal for someone who loves privacy as much as he does, and in part because the total, brutal break with the world that Trappists are required to make would have caused too much pain to his family and friends.

A few people he knew told him about Roissac, which is a Benedictine monastery. He went to look at it and liked it. He made a second, longer visit to Roissac, but remained tempted by the Trappists. The abbot of Roissac told him not to worry about it, but to go home and wind up his affairs; when the answer was in place, he would know it. So he returned to Paris for a year or two, taking on no new students but bringing all the ones he had through to the end of their studies. In time he decided to enter the Benedictine monastery. He didn't tell many people what he was planning to do, so when he did announce it, it seemed abrupt. But in truth it wasn't. Before he left Paris, he gave away all his possessions and stopped accepting bookings. He performed his last concert a few days before he joined the Benedictines at Roissac. Madame de Brunhoff took his decision hard. Music had been the bond between them and the most important thing in the world to her.

AT Roissac, Alain was immediately happy and knew it was where he belonged. He stopped playing the piano. He felt that his religious life demanded complete commitment and so did his music. He had to choose between them. Many of the monks were men of accomplishment—one designed tapestries, another worked in stained glass, another was a ceramicist, yet another was a composer—and continued to practice their art in the monastery. Alain's renunciation was something he imposed on himself.

He became a hermit gradually. The abbot had arranged for a few of the monks to take part in some discussions of spiritual matters at a place outside the monastery where they would be free to concentrate—a kind of retreat. The place they chose, at the random suggestion of someone who had never been there, was an enclave of cottages on the grounds of a convent near the hamlet of St. Paul. Alain loved the quiet of the spot. Later, when he went through a period of mental fatigue so great that the abbot noticed and suggested he take some time off, he chose to return there. He began going there regularly for two weeks a year. Eight years went by. Since he discussed everything with his abbot, the abbot knew that he wanted to leave Roissac and move permanently to St. Paul. They decided that he would go back for a month, as a test; they chose January, the hardest month. It was cold, damp, and miserable, but Alain felt spiritually comfortable there, and eventually the abbot decided to let him move.

Alain related his tale to us with the intensity he had brought to playing Chopin and with an inclusiveness I know from my mother's accounts of her illnesses. As she describes, with a reverence that is hard to enter into, her dealings with the doctors, the nurses, and the orderlies in the hospital, he described meetings with his abbot and consultations with his fellow monks. What came through most clearly to me, in addition to the purity of his commitment to the life he had chosen, was a recurrent need to withdraw

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from other people, which seemed a response to and perhaps also a source of his intense desirability.

We spent an enormous amount of time at lunch; then we sat in the leather chairs of the hotel lounge and talked more. When the sun was lower, we headed back to Alain's hermitage. Past the spot where we'd first met him, the road dipped down and ran alongside the nuns' compound. We drove beyond that, over a small bridge, and around another few bends to a gate, where we left the car. Then we walked past a wooden outhouse, a shower shed, and a chapel, and up a path, with little houses visible through clearings in the scrub.

The enclave had room for ten hermits, who came for stays of a week to a month; Alain was the only one who remained on a permanent basis. The tile-roofed yellow-stucco house in which he had been living for three years when we saw him was about ten by ten feet, the size of a large tool shed. Its one room contained a mattress on raised boards, covered with an army blanket, a desk and chair under a wall of windows, which were covered in burlap to keep out the sun, and an armoire, also covered in burlap, on top of which were a suitcase and some folders. On the wall by the bed was a cross made from two branches roughly nailed together. The floor was covered in linoleum-patterned Con-Tact paper. A lightbulb with a simple metal shade hung from the ceiling. The roof tiles showed above the supporting beams, and the effect was pleasantly rustic. On the desk were a Bible, prayer books, postcards of religious art, and a box containing family photographs. In a bookcase next to the desk Alain kept his correspondence, a ceramic-disc heater, and an electric pesticide diffuser, as well as books.

NATURE is violent in this region. When it rains, torrents come down the mountainside. Sometimes the hermitage was cut off from the sisters by flash floods that covered the bridge over what was at the time of our visit a totally dry, rock-strewn streambed. The hillside was gashed where water had cut through the land. During the first winter Alain had watched the water rise outside the house. When it was a foot deep, he began packing his suitcase. Before he could leave, the door burst open under the force of the flood, and the house was instantly filled with water brown from mud and cow dung. This, he said, was his lowest point.

In winter the cold was intense, but a large, old-fashioned heater made it bearable. He hoped the new disc heater would help too, but wanted to know if it consumed much electricity, because he didn't want to burden the sisters, who paid the electric bill. In the fall and the spring everything got wet and stayed that way. Moisture soaked through from the outside, and mildew covered the walls. Three lumberjacks who lived nearby had built him a little lean-to or porch at the front of the house, so that rain would not beat directly against his door and front window. When we were there, too much heat was the problem. With no foundation and no insulation in the roof, the temperature in the bungalow often reached 95°.

"It's a dangerous thing to be a hermit, because if you're not serious, it quickly becomes ridiculous," Alain said. He had begun to teach himself Hebrew, to read the Old Testament. But he found that he was spending more and more time at it. Whenever he had a spare moment, he would turn to the Hebrew book. It began to fill his head, so he finally had to stop: after all, he wasn't there to learn languages. He had constantly to remember what the ultimate purpose of all of it was, and stick to it. You can easily become a nature-loving bum, he said, or someone who sleeps a lot.

In fact he was busy; his time was full. He received letters, many of them enormously long, from friends, family, and former students. Answering them was a drain on his energy, and since they were serious letters, they had to be answered seriously. People brought him their problems. A friend who twice had tried to commit suicide had just written saying that he urgently wanted to come see him. How could Alain say no? He had prayers to say several times a day, and he went to mass with the sisters every morning. Since they fed him, preparing a bucket of food that he picked up every morning, he felt he had to pay them back somehow. He did it by cutting brush. He had a large-wheeled brush cutter that he operated in the afternoon—the only free time he had. In the heat of the day it was brutal work.

He showed us his view. To the side and in front of the house, across a deep cleft, the land rose sharply to a majestic rocky ridge. It was like a wave about to crash down, frozen in stone. He had asked the mother superior for permission to cut an oak in order to get this view, and Laurent twitted him. Didn't this smack of aestheticism? It depended on the purpose, Alain replied. If it was an end in itself, yes. If it aided him in communicating with God, no. He had chosen renunciation not for renunciation's sake but in the service of something else—his relationship with God. If things got in the way of that, as music did, then he had to give them up. He couldn't split himself. "But I'm not a Cartesian, bound in by walls so I can look up only to the sky. Whatever helps me is okay. This helps."

One of the things he liked most about his hermitage, he said, was the silence: "Silence is my music now." He could pick up the small sounds of the wind in the leaves, the sounds of insects and animals. Sometimes when the wind was strong, it blew the sound of the traffic on the autoroute to him. He liked it. He liked to think of all the people going on with their lives and to think of himself as in a sense staying where he was for their sakes, "like a lighthouse keeper."

He said he had done a little writing, but he was wary of it. It becomes *gargarisme*—throat-gargling. You begin to think you're important. You write things up, inflate them. You moussify inside—that is, I guess, foam up like egg whites. (At this point I was feeling very shabby, a *gargariste* and a moussifier. Moreover, I had every intention of going back to the hotel and writing down what Alain had said.) The point of passing time in solitude is to strip yourself bare, to discover what is essential and true. When you're stripped down to this point, you see how little you amount to. But that little is all that God is interested in. He doesn't give a damn about the rest.

Alain disapproves completely of my having written this and asked me not to publish it. I've changed his name, the name of his monastery and its location, and the name and location of his hermitage to protect his privacy, but I will never get him to see my having written what he told me as anything but a violation of a confidence. By profession and national temperament, I believe in making things known; by profession and national temperament, he believes in keeping them quiet.

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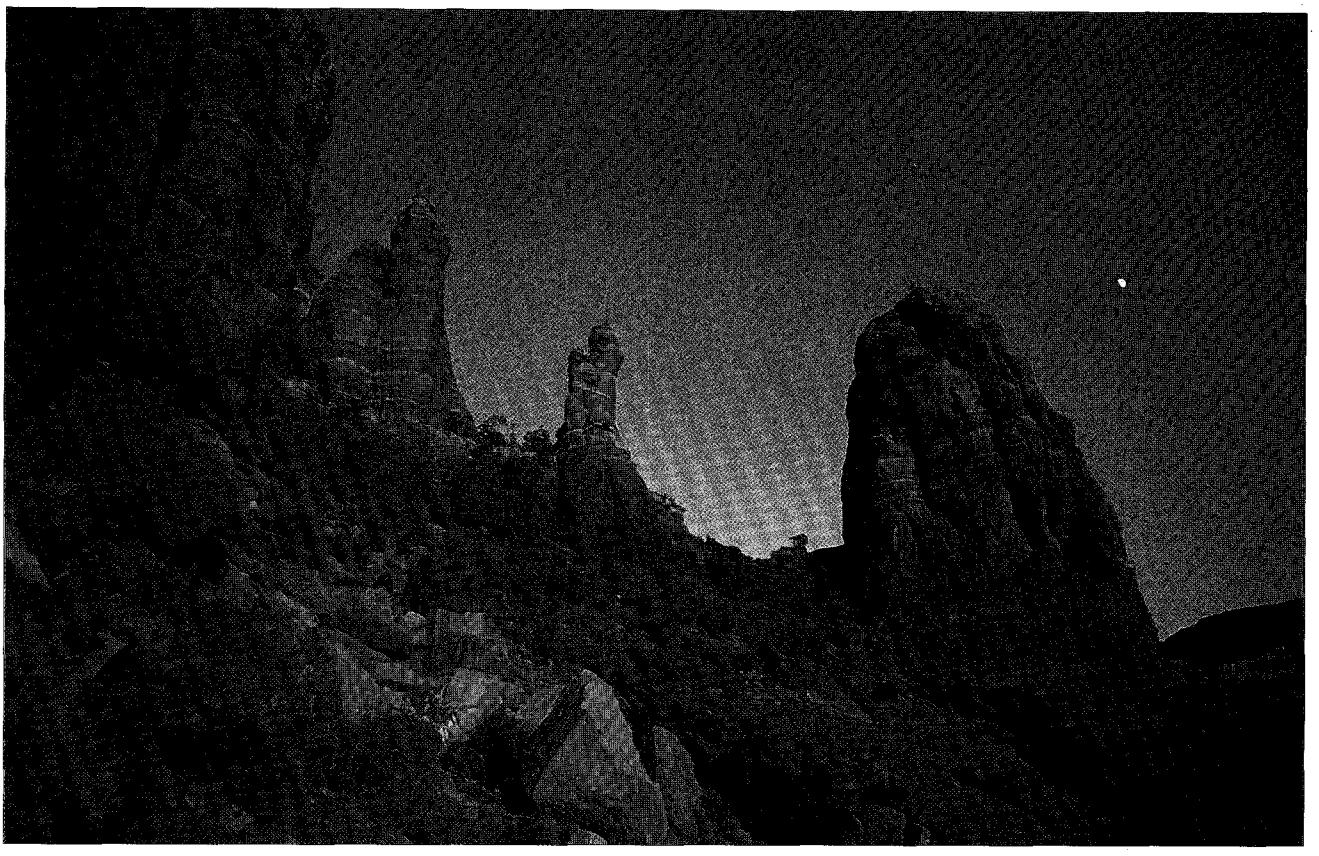

White Snow, Red Rocks

Is Sedona, Arizona, cosmically energizing or simply refreshing?

by Peter Davison

THOUGH Sedona, Arizona, was founded in 1902, Zane Grey, the hardworking western novelist, was the first writer to "discover" it, in the 1920s. Landscape on the Arizona scale challenges the resources of human speech; it beggared Grey, who had to resort to stilted terms from the construction industry to describe the mighty cliffs of the Grand Canyon: "Turrets, mesas, domes, parapets, and escarpments gave the appearance of an architectural work of giant hands." To use such language for the vastness of these badlands is to commend the horse in the lingo of the horsefly. There's an old story that a priest and a cowboy arrived together at the canyon's North Rim and stood silent a while. Finally the priest fell upon his knees and exclaimed, "O Lord, how wonderful are thy works!" The cowboy ruminated, spat, and muttered, "Don't it beat hell?"

The panorama of Sedona is less vast than the Grand Canyon, a hundred miles to the north, and allows a certain intimacy that the Grand Canyon's similar splendors discourage; still, it overwhelms language. An extra energy seems to fill the air near Sedona, honeycombed as the region is by north-south canyons whose streams have dug gaps 1,500 feet deep through the layered strata of the Mogollon Rim of the Colorado Plateau. The waters of Oak Creek, together with the prevailing westerly winds, have been incising the sandstones and limestones of the Mogollon Rim for the past 10 million years. The cliffs and abutments of these canyons make for mighty vistas, a violence of contrast between towers and caves of sandstone, red and buff, set off by pale-green prickly pear and dark-green juniper, azure sky and gray gravel. The huge, shimmering spaces, brilliant with scarlet, ochre, green, pale yellow, and grainy gray, capture the eye—but to rely on the eye alone is to miss much. The colors and the landscape produce an almost Islamic excitement in the senses, and the touch of the bone-dry air intensifies this sensuous irritation, so that a rise of 500 feet or a temperature change of only a few degrees is instantly felt, requiring a certain agility with regard to sweaters and gloves.

My wife and I visited Sedona last February, before the spring season (March

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through May) got under way. (There's a late-summer season as well, but it can be monsoony.) The nights sparkled with cold; the days warmed and waned. On Valentine's Day the sun came up to reveal an overnight dusting of new snow across the desert, but as soon as sunlight crept down the canyon walls, it nibbled at the snow, which quickly evaporated from the flat places. Sedona itself lies at 4,240 feet, but at higher altitudes mature snowbanks still dawdled in the bottom of shaded canyons. Dozens of hikes, along variably difficult trails, are laid out around the area, and no two are alike. The erosion that carved the canyons has produced an infinite range of shapes, but it never takes much of a climb to get to a high place where you can peer out across an intermediate vastness and observe a spot with a different climate perhaps half a mile away. You can see a lot (but not enough) from your car. The radiance of the light, together with the thin, fragrant air striking the face, sensitizes the walker in this dazzling landscape to the immanence of natural instincts, which can also be aroused at dusk by the clamorous serenade of coyotes celebrating a kill or rejoicing in one another. Nearly everyone feels something more beyond what they can see.

THE Native Americans regarded Sedona as a holy place. A Navajo guide said to me, describing a dream of the past, "It was a time when all was with the Spirit." World-weary New Age tourists have learned to throng, in clusters of parked cars, at the several unearthly locations in the Sedona neighborhood known as vortexes, which collectively make up one of the eleven "power points" of the planet. (The power points reached a moment of harmonic convergence in 1987, marking a new dawn. Guess what. Two years later the Berlin Wall came down.) As my wife and I were hiking up Boynton Canyon, we came to a large, nearly empty clearing, with logs laid like benches around its circumference, and cairns of all sorts set in front of them—little towers and long snakes of hand-selected rocks. This clearing is said to be part of the yin-yang vortex, where one can feel the energy from the center of the earth. Along came a man who had climbed to the rim of the canyon above and seen a place where there were crystals in the rocks, radiating in all directions, and emanating who knows what to crowds of eager energy-seekers. A couple we encountered in the clearing, judging from the way they were grooming leaves out of each other's hair, had been attempting to evoke energy by a different means. They were from British Columbia. They went their way, but we stayed a while to test the nature of the place—and I can swear that, without laying a finger on my wife, I definitely felt *something*.

But cosmic energy, like other aspects of Sedona, has fallen into the hands of hucksters. Sedona is of course what is called a tourist mecca. It offers a variety of accommodations for a variety of tastes, ranging from fancy resorts whose rooms may cost $300 a night in season to motels and bed-and-breakfasts that can be had for $75. The main street, built along the west bank of Oak Creek opposite wondrous monuments of red-and-white rock, has, alas, come way down in the world, like the main streets of Estes Park and Central City: it's a place of malls, motels, real-estate brokers, and crafts shops selling undistinguished turquoise jewelry and "obsidian handmade flint-knapped knives." Other shops, like the Blue-Eyed Bear and the two large emporia of Native American crafts operated by the Garland family, display better goods and ask higher prices. The fanciest shops are mostly in the Tlaquepaque Arts and Crafts Village, where they suffer a trifle from Spanish Colonial *Gemütlichkeit*.

Sedona's restaurants range from the attractively gaudy Red Planet Diner (with sci-fi decor); Oaxaca, a moderately priced Mexican restaurant; and The Sage, a charming vegetarian restaurant, to the Heartline Cafe, with its pretentious offerings; L'Auberge de Sedona, presenting high-priced *degustations*; and the Enchantment Resort, which serves complicated dishes featuring elk and ostrich. The resorts also offer facilities organized around horses, baccarat, top-of-the-line shopping, cigars, and vintage port. For other tastes Sedona offers widely advertised hot-air-balloon rides, helicopter tours, photo tours, red-rock tours, and pink-jeep tours (meant to be as bumpy as the E-rides at Disney World), and sells tickets for the Verde Canyon Railroad, down the highway. These forms of traffic are all a bit irrelevant if you came away to find only yourself.

AND then there are the natives, like the Navajo guide, and the Latino waitress who appeared smiling at my elbow, as if by magic, each morning as I glimpsed the bottom of my coffee cup. In every restaurant, hotel, diner, shop, and other public place people were, as usual in the West, unfailingly cheerful and polite. But, though good humor is not to be sneezed at, my wife and I had not traveled so far for the company.

Away from town, on the trails along the canyons, we found it easy to call a hello to walkers we met coming the other way. But memory retains less of the conversations than of what the feet have walked on. It does your mind and body good to hear the *thunk* of your boot on the well-packed earth of a trail; to be conscious of steadying your stance on a gnarled tree root; to feel the little thrill of threading your way across the stepping-stones of a ford; to respond to the rush of new, thin mountain air into your lungs; to experience the nervous excitement of climbing down a place steep enough to make you wonder whether you should be face out or face in; to learn how sensitive you can be to heat and cold as you shed a layer of clothes along a sunny reach of trail and slip back into it after a shady bend; to rest, breathing hard, and listen to the splash of a stream and the hiss of the breeze; to spy, crossing the trail before you in the drying morning dust, the sharp tracks of deer or javelinas (as peccaries are called here) or the softer tracks of coyotes; to look up at the stars after dark—larger than remembered, and in new positions.

To penetrate a remnant of western wildness was to participate in what Thoreau called the preservation of the world. We went to Sedona not for society but for solitude. For our taste, there might have been too many people around—probably too many cars and certainly too many helicopters. But there is still plenty of space between the red rocks of Sedona to restore the body and the spirit, whether or not you feel it necessary to bask among the crystals in the radiations of cosmic energy.

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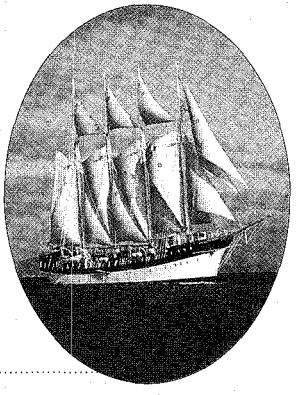

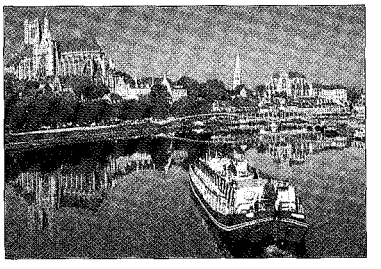

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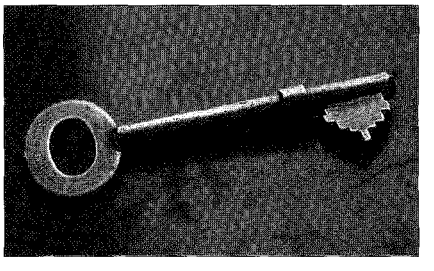

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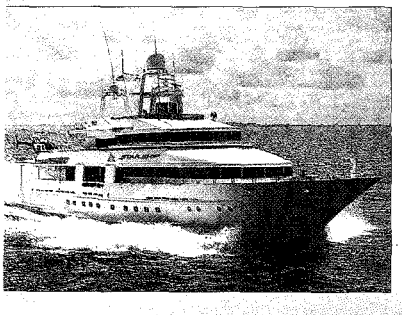

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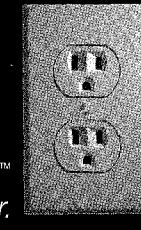

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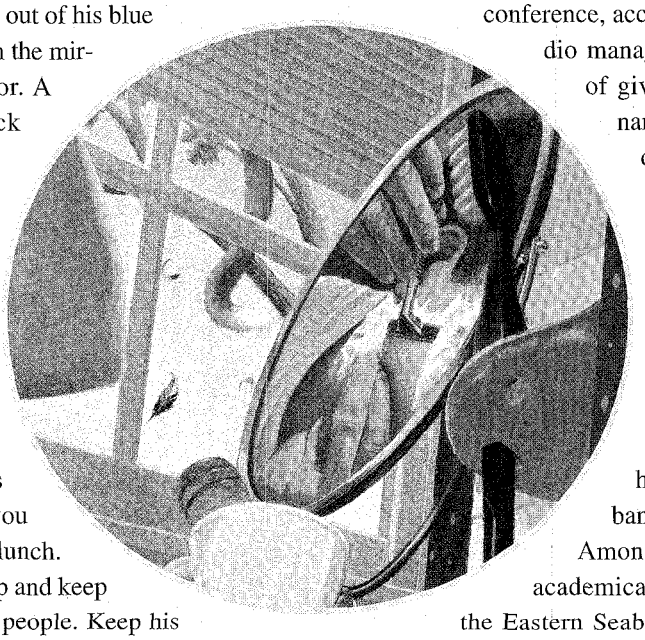
Talk Radio

by GARRISON KEILLOR

JOHN Tollefson awoke to the clanging of the clock downstairs, and rose from bed, took out the plastic mouthpiece he wore to keep from grinding his teeth, did his deep knee bends and pushups, and touched his toes. His feet looked gnarly, with shoe marks on them. He definitely was getting a gut on him. He stepped out of his blue pajamas and looked at himself in the mirror on the bedroom-closet door. A middle-aged guy should check himself out every day and assess the devastation, he thought. The flab around the waist, the wobble under the chin. And he needed to practice smiling at himself in the mirror. Young guys can get away with being sullen; it even looks good on them. But on an older guy gloominess looks like indigestion. People think you had too much knackwurst for lunch.



An older guy has to lighten up and keep himself looking fresh. Smile at people. Keep his sense of humor. Even if he feels lonely as a barn owl. The world is interested, up to a point, in the sorrows of women, but it doesn't give a hoot about the problems of a middle-aged Norwegian bachelor—and why should it? So don't bother being unhappy; it only makes you look like a creep.

He stood over the toilet bowl and peed and half expected the water in the bowl to turn bright red with blood. He'd been expecting catastrophic illness since he turned forty. He'd go off to some specialist in the city and sit in a beige waiting room, thinking about his crumbling innards, pleading with God for mercy, perusing tattered issues of *People*, thinking, "I am spending some of my precious last hours on earth learning more about Brad Pitt." And proceed to the examining room. Disrobe. Wait for the arrival of the prostate potentate himself, Dr. Oh, and his various benedictions and incantations, and then the presentation of the posterior for the digital exam.

You can take the guy out of Lake Wobegon

Maybe he should get out of radio and do something distinguished with his life.

The immediate cause of his misery was the speech he had to give the next day in Washington, D.C., at a public-radio conference, accepting the Wally Award for radio management. He hated the thought of giving a speech. The Wally was named for a station manager who died in 1986 and whose colleagues wanted to honor him because they felt bad about not having liked him much. John was the general manager of WSJO, in Red Cliff, New York, the radio voice of St. James College, a mouldering Episcopalian outpost heavily endowed by Christian bandits of the nineteenth century. Among financially gifted parents of academically challenged students along the Eastern Seaboard it was known as a place where you could pack off your child and feel that, barring a felony conviction, he or she would get to wear a black gown and receive a sheepskin with the St. James crest (*"Omnibus Omnia"*) on it.

His boss, Dean Baird, had nominated him for the Wally Award, which John guessed might be a prelude to his being fired. They did that in public radio—gave awards to guys right before they took them out to be shot, as a relaxant, so that the doomed man wouldn't struggle. They gave you the plaque and then they deaccessioned your head.

The dean had been pushing John for two years to change the format of WSJO from music to talk. "There's no point playing classical music on the radio when everyone I know has CD players in their cars," said the dean. He wanted more news, call-in shows, documentaries. He prodded John into

Illustrations by John Maggard

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hiring a gaunt, sallow-faced woman named Susan Mack as public-affairs director, who had, in a year and a half, produced two documentaries, one on premature menopause and the other on mercury poisoning from dental fillings—"Amalgam: The Enemy in Your Mouth." The menopause one was a lulu, a marathon gripefest, an orgy of self-pity, women moaning and grousing about their sad lives and the uncomprehending world around them, and some of those women showed up on the mercury-poisoning one, too—the symptoms of that (forgetfulness, fatigue, depression, achiness) being symptoms of menopause as well. Plus there was the usual pious droning and technical jabber from various experts. A thoroughly mind-numbing piece of radio, so of course it received a Du Pont Award, and Susan went on a speaking tour, yakking about why she had had all of her own amalgam fillings replaced, and how this had improved the quality of her personal relationships. Now she was working on a third documentary, on agoraphobia.

What a pill she was.

John hated talk radio. Especially public-radio talk shows. He loathed them. Drowsy voices dithering and blithering, obsessive academics whittling their fine points, aging bohemians with their Bambi world view, earnest schoolmarms, murmury liberals, ditzy New Agers, plodding Luddites, sad-eyed ladies of the lowland, all of them good and decent and progressive and well-read and Deeply Concerned. Concerned about children, about justice and equality, about the clouds in the clear blue sky. Everything they said was to show their Concern, to demonstrate their innate goodness; nothing they said came from firsthand observation; they had no experience whatsoever, only Concern, and the sign of their Deep Concern was their use of dozens, if not hundreds, of modifying clauses in each sentence, which was a great deal (or at least more than one might ideally hope for) of modification, the result being audio oatmeal, and two hours of them wasn't worth one Chopin prelude, in his book. When you listened to Arthur Rubinstein play Chopin, you were no longer a liberal or a conservative or even an American but simply a breathing, sensate human being with a soul. Music lent you the freedom of your own mind. You listened to the Mahler Fourth Symphony or the Tchaikovsky Serenade for Strings, and it evoked scenes and visions of your own life and elevated these revelations into the realm of art. Talk radio left you with nothing except a feeling of superiority to the poor schlumps talking on the radio.

HE turned on *Morning Edition* as he shaved and showered. A man was lamenting the slaughter of songbirds by America's house cats and calling for a congressional investigation. By the time he was dressed and in the kitchen, WSJO had moved on to a Haydn organ mass, and he poached two eggs to the Kyrie and toasted rye bread to the Gloria in Excelsis Deo, and cranked up the volume for the Sanctus, the polyphonic voices like two sets of waves rocking an anchored boat from two directions, and then the levitation of the Agnus Dei—how lucky he was, praise God. He looked around at the sleek kitchen, took in the white Finnish cabinets, the oak breakfast table by the window, and in the corner a painting of Bergen, the brick warehouses, the green and white and cream houses behind, the green trees marching up the mountainside, the sunlight pouring into the valley—the last sight his ancestors had glimpsed of Norway.

He hated talk radio because he had never cared for piety. He grew up among pietists back in Lake Wobegon; he knew how they killed the spirit. Whenever he went to a party, if he got into the room where people were discussing the future of liberalism or the need for greater public support of the arts, he backed right out and went in search of the room where men and women were dancing in the dark, or the room where men were holed up telling lies about the time they and their buddies filled up a guy's car with a hundred gallons of pig manure.

Talk radio was part of the tide of dreariness slopping across America. Franchise architecture, generic shopping malls, popular music as ugly and empty as it was possible to be, and talk radio. The Cold War was over, the stock market was booming, equity bursting at the seams, the twenty-first century winked and beckoned, and yet the world's only superpower, America, the Nation of Nations, was in the dumps, gloom was playing on the soundtrack, and when you tuned in the radio, you heard maniacs foaming about the Clinton conspiracy to enslave America. The media wandered, lost in narcissism and the fear of death and a slavish servility toward the rich and a knee-jerk contempt for leaders. If ever an era needed bucking up, it was this one—but academics had given up. You asked them for a vision, they gave you dissenting opinions.

He thought, "Lighten up. You're thinking like an old fart."

John left his house on Green Street and crossed College Avenue. The ashes and maples along the street, the grass in the yards, the lilacs and forsythia and dogwood—a voluptuous green lay on every hand, hung overhead, came to his nose, an affluence of green, plants drunk in the morning sun. He crossed the street and headed toward the Quad and inhaled the smell of new-mown grass from a triple mower piloted by a girl in shorts and a red halter top who wheeled around on the far sidewalk and headed toward him. He walked across the greensward and around the back of the chapel. Behind the chapel was Gridley Hall, patterned after Huntly Castle, in Scotland, donated by a Gridley who had stripped the forests of northern Wisconsin down to the underbrush. The offices and studios of WSJO were on the fifth floor. He came through the glass door (WSJO—PUBLIC RADIO FOR THE FINGER LAKES) and the secretary, Fawn Phillips, looked up and smiled her golden smile. Her boyfriend, Trent, sat beside her desk, slumped in a chair under the Larry Rivers poster of Madame Butterfly. "Good morning, Mr. Tollefson," she said.

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"It's a beautiful day, Miss Phillips," he said. "It's a work of art. It's a day by Monet."

She, on the other hand, was like an angel by Botticelli, her wavy blonde hair tumbling down her shoulders. She smiled a pure Renaissance smile. He had hired her impulsively, a graduate of St. James, because she was angelic, and only later did he discover that she could not spell or write, and was the president of a group called Wounded Daughters of Distant Fathers.

"Good morning, Trent," said John.

"Hey," said Trent. He blinked his gecko eyes and slid a couple of inches up in the chair and pulled in his legs. He wore baggy pants and a striped jersey and giant air-sole basketball shoes, and his cap was turned backward on his clumpy hair; earphones clamped on his head emitted a sound like tiny chain saws.

The May membership drive was in full swing, and when John came through the door, he heard his own voice reminding listeners that WSJO was a wonderful addition to their lives—and then Priscilla Lee Wheaton came on the air to mention the WSJO coffee mug, tote bag, and umbrella, the premiums offered for contributions of $30, $50, and $100.

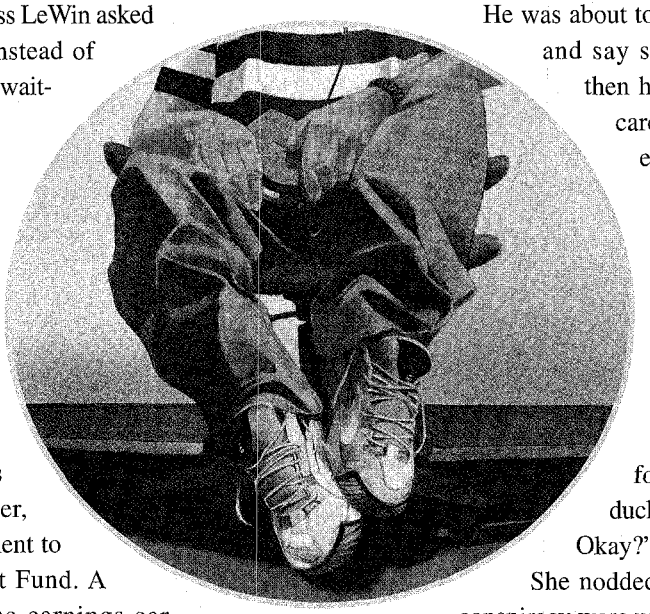
John walked into his office, followed by Fawn, and closed the door. The office was long, with his desk at the far end and a pleasant sitting area with a blue-striped couch and two mauve wing chairs and a teak coffee table, and square in the middle a bay window with a view of the Quad.

"The dean says he needs to see you before you leave for Washington," she said. "And Miss LeWin asked if you could come at eleven instead of noon. Her cat is sick, and she's waiting for the vet."

"Which cat is it?"

"She didn't say."

"Probably Snowball. He's the old one." John had been to Miss LeWin's house, and he'd memorized the names of all eight of her cats. Snowball was the easy one. Miss LeWin, whose mother was a Rockefeller, was eighty years old, and John was courting her, looking for the propitious moment to propose a LeWin Endowment Fund. A million dollars, locked up, the earnings earmarked for the production of opera and classical-music programs on WSJO. That would be his counteroffensive against the dean. Miss LeWin was a friend of St. James; she had donated the carillon. She adored opera. Her father had taken her to see Rosa Ponselle in *Carmen* when Miss LeWin was seven years old, and this experience was still vivid to her. She had hinted to John that she was in the process of rethinking her "legacy," as she put it, and was considering WSJO. The main competitor seemed to be a gay guy named Alan Dale who wanted to start an opera company in Syracuse. He was a major cat lover and had wormed his way into her good graces and advised her on fashion matters.



"Tell the dean I'll call him from Washington," John said.

"Okay." Fawn nodded. "Could I show you something?" She handed him a CD. "Is this anything you'd consider playing on the air?" It was called *Meadows of the Mind*, by a singer named Loti, and had a picture of a misty pasture on the front. He pulled out the insert and saw that the lyrics were printed, lines like

> I float with the wind
> I am open, listening, to my life
> The wind—music of my life
> Every day its magic reveals itself to me.

"Her music comes from a very powerful place," Fawn said.

Loti looked to be about thirty, a slender Brünnhilde in jeans and a flaxen blouse, and there were endless thank-yous and acknowledgments, the sure sign of a New Age album: "Thank you Allan and Shondra for your strength and encouragement. . . . Thank you Shakti for being there. . . . Thank you Mufti for your faith in me . . ."—the list went on for two pages.

"If you're able to open yourself up to it, it's like a spirit bath," Fawn said.

He was about to put his hand on her shoulder and say something about music, and then he pulled back. You had to be careful about touching a Wounded Daughter. What you thought was a pat on the shoulder might be taken as groping for her zipper. He pretended to have pointed toward the window. "Looks like rain," he said. He told her to say he wasn't in the office if the dean should call and ask for him. "I'd like to get all my ducks in a row before I talk to him. Okay?"

She nodded, her eyes big, as if a major conspiracy were under way.

His desk was oak, massive, yellow. It once had belonged to the president of the New York Central Railroad. Dark deals had been struck over this desk, unions busted, congressmen bought, virgins sacrificed to the Wall Street gods. Now it held a small wooden loon, a coffee mug, a stack of payroll checks to sign. A memo from the dean about meeting the needs of minority listeners.

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Summer, Northern Sweden. Where entire months pass without even a hint of nightfall. "If only," you think, slipping into the leather seat of your 900 SE Turbo Convertible, "I could have more hours of sunlight, too." As you pull away accompanied by three friends, the 185-horsepower turbocharged engine spins to life, leaving everything in your wake but a slight tinge of envy. Then, as the wind rushes by you, and the sun sinks behind the horizon, even envy loosens its grip. And the realization dawns: maybe you can't have 24 hours of sunlight where you live, but you could just as easily let your turbo howl at the moon.

SAAB

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WHEN YOU LIVE
IN A COUNTRY WHERE
THE SUN DOESN'T SET
FOR A MONTH, YOU BUILD
A CAR FOR IT.

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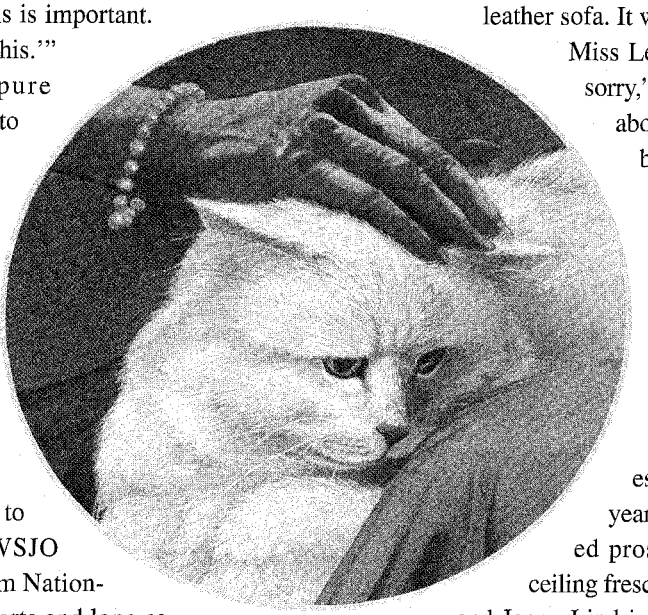
On the air Priscilla was saying, "We need the help of every single one of you out there who listens to WSJO and who values our programming. *Morning Edition*, *All Things Considered*, *Car Talk*, *Thistle and Shamrock*, *As It Happens*, *Fresh Air*, *The Morning Concert With Thomas Neil Cameron*—where would you be without them? If you listen, and you like what you hear, then go to your phone right now and give us a call and say 'Yes! This is important. This is good. I want to support this.'"



Membership Week was pure irony on public radio: you tried to raise money to pay for your wonderful programs by interrupting your wonderful programs and making this horrible scraping and whining and wheedling noise—it was truly dreadful, and yet he was fond of it. It was the only time his employees did real radio, and looked deep into the microphone and tried to talk to people. Week in, week out, WSJO drifted along on audio feeds from National Public Radio and taped concerts and long selections of recorded music, and then Membership Week came chugging in like a John Deere tractor, and everybody had to come out from behind the golden arras and dig potatoes for a few days.

JOHN pulled up the long drive to The Poplars at 10:58, and parked under the portico. He ascended the steps and clunked the big brass knocker, and Miss LeWin opened the door, looking distraught, her eyes lined with red, and her white hair, usually styled and sprayed, poking out from under a scarf. She motioned him into the front hall. She wore a brown-silk housecoat with a large fish painted on each pocket and brown slacks and a pair of pink slippers, and she looked thinner than ever, her face emaciated, the skin tight over her jawbone. He took her bony hand.

"I'm terribly sorry about your cat," he said.

"It's bronchitis," she said. "He's running a fever. Would you mind if we sat in the hall, so I can be nearby if he wakes up?" She sat on a loveseat under a painting of roses that John realized was a Renoir and was not a reproduction. He pulled up a chair. It was sweltering in the house. The heat was on. "I'm glad to see you looking so well," he said. "I hope you received my letter." She nodded and dabbed at her eyes with a handkerchief.

"As I said in the letter, we put your last two gifts—which were extremely generous, and thank you again—we put those into a sort of trust fund, the LeWin Endowment, from which we plan to use the annual earnings to underwrite classical music, and opera in particular. And I guess that what remains to be discussed is your feelings at this point about building that endowment to the point where the interest would be enough to secure the future of our music broadcasts."

The door to the library was open a few inches, and John could see, in the dimness within, a pile of white fur on a leather sofa. It was not moving.

Miss LeWin dabbed at her eye. "I'm sorry," she said. "I get so emotional about my cats." She said she had been to see Mr. Alan Dale, who showed her the old Palace Theater, which he proposed to put his opera company in. He would name it for her father: the Arthur LeWin Musical Theater. She had once seen Lillian Gish in person at the Palace. It was the grandest place—boarded up for thirty years, but she remembered its gilded proscenium, the chandelier, the ceiling fresco of angels welcoming Caruso and Jenny Lind into heaven. "It seats two thousand," she said, "and I don't know if there are that many opera-lovers in the area, but Alan does not lack for confidence. He wants to start immediately and renovate the theater and do a season of four operas starting in the fall—I admire his ambition. Do you know him?"

"I do," said John. "Alan is a good man. Very smart. Very ambitious. And I'm familiar with the Palace." He clasped his hands under his chin. "I'd recommend that you consult a structural engineer before you put money into it. I've heard that if a hundred people in the balcony stamped their feet in rhythm, the whole building could come down."

Miss LeWin's eyes widened, as if she saw oncoming headlights.

"Alan is a good man, though. Brilliant, in fact. I have great respect for him. He did that production of *La Bohème* in Minneapolis four years ago that caused all the fuss at the National Endowment for the Arts. You remember that? No? It was set in the East Village and Mimi dies of AIDS and Rodolfo is actually in love with Schaunard, and at the end the singers fling paint into the audience. Not my cup of tea, but the guy has his convictions. I do think that anytime you have simulated sex onstage, you're going to offend a lot of people. The scene where the baritone and the tenor stripped naked and jumped under the sheets—it caused a major hooha in Congress, and they whacked about six million off the NEA appropriation, but I guess Alan did what he had to do."

She took a deep breath. Apparently, Alan Dale had not filled her in on his entire oeuvre.

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John continued. "I must say, I believe in the classical repertoire. I really do. *Bohème*, *Turandot*, *Carmen*, *Traviata*—call them warhorses if you like, but to me, those are the doorways that a person goes through in order to discover opera. A six-year-old child could see *Carmen* and love it, and that child would care about opera forever. But not if *Carmen* takes place at a stock-car race and Don José is called Joe and everybody's in leather and the 'Habanera' is about carburetors. Call me old-fashioned, but people writhing around naked onstage and singing political slogans does not constitute opera, Miss LeWin. I don't think so."

The white fur in the library slid down off the couch and walked toward the door, and opened its mouth in a silent meow.

"I have so much to do in the next few months," she said. "I am going in for surgery in October, and I want to get my affairs in order."

"If there's any way I can help," he said, "please let me know."

DRIVING east toward the interstate, he hoped that Snowball did not succumb to pneumonia, in which case millions of dollars might go to shelter stray kitties. He thought of writing Miss LeWin a follow-up letter, about the tax advantages of the endowment. He didn't want to come across as a bloodsucker, but on the other hand, you shouldn't play the fish too delicately at this point; you had to make sure the hook was set.

He drove to Washington, thinking about his speech ("Public radio is an invisible asset in America. There are radio stations for aging rock-and-rollers, the religious right, the audience with metal things stuck in their heads, the deer-hunting, beer-drinking audience, and there should be one for folks who find spiritual sustenance in great music. Beethoven, Mozart, and Puccini are part of the broad humanistic tradition that we all draw water from, where we find centrist values such as tolerance, curiosity, a sense of justice, and humor. We should not discard this tradition in favor of creating a Wailing Wall, a freak show like Speakers' Corner in Hyde Park, a radio zoo where people can hear lunatics foam and growl and rush at the bars"), and got to his hotel at ten. He ordered a club sandwich from room service, and edited the speech while watching the Letterman show, in which a woman in a low-cut dress appeared with her tropical fish, who did cartwheels when they heard "Stars and Stripes Forever." Nothing, he thought, was so somber as a single room in a big convention hotel—the decor bland and yet hostile, as if designed by civil engineers; the immense TV; the hard bed that nobody ever had sweet dreams in. He awoke exhausted, hollow, at ten-thirty in the morning, showered, dressed, and went down to the ballroom, where important people stood and scanned the room for other important people. None of them looked at him for more than a second.

He took his seat at the head table, along with some famous people he had never heard of, whose names he forgot immediately. They screeched and hugged; men slapped one another on the back. John pulled out his speech and looked at it. He didn't touch the lunch of veal medallions with potatoes au gratin and crême brulée, and then the woman next to him—who produced segments of *All Things We Wish You Were Interested In*, as John called it—started yakking about storytelling as the glue of community. She had come from a seminar that very morning at which Jonah Hadley had spoken on the subject. He had been brilliant, she said.

"Jonah Hadley's Journal," an audio essay, a sermon with sound effects, ran every week on *All Things Considered*. Hadley was a good writer in the worst sense of the word: humorless, tone-deaf, smug, predictable, all gesture, no smarts. He'd talk about sugar mapling in Vermont, and you'd hear the crunch-crunch-crunch of footsteps in the snow and the drip of the sap in the bucket and some extremely laconic Vermonters muttering something about syrup (they talked at a rate of four words a minute, which gave their mutterance an air of vast profundity), and then Jonah tied it all up with a whispery voice-over, something solemn and flabby about tradition as a force for sanity in our lives, a few sentences that managed to bring in Tocqueville, Bob Dylan, the quest for the Holy Grail, a quotation from an obscure Sufi poet, the crisis of male identity in the nineties, the myth of Sisyphus, and the Easter bunny.

The awards program began, and people at the head table were introduced, and some of them spoke, and the woman next to him stood up and said a few words for a long time, and then a man in a plaid jacket talked about the Wally Award and referred to the original Wally as "an innovator

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OPTION

The groundhog den in the soft bank
always has a back door. And when
confronted by a terrier
tearing at the aproned entrance,
the woodchuck exits out the back,
surfacing in weeds or thicket.
He will not be a prisoner
or a martyr in his own burrow.
The whistle-pig has an option,
call it deniability,
for his whereabouts. He has
the alibi of absence.

—ROBERT MORGAN

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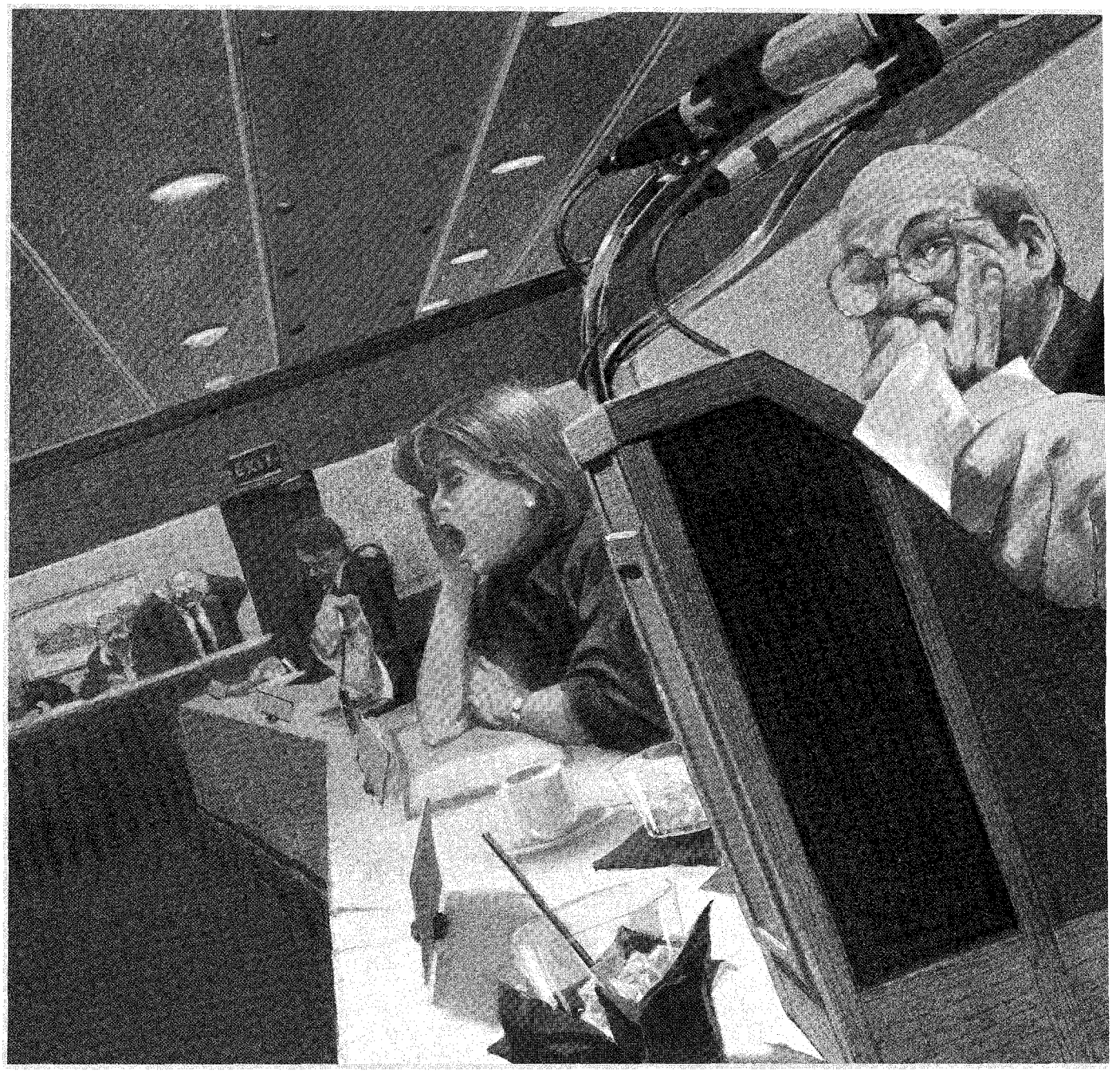

who was deeply committed to radio," a description, John thought, that covered many sins indeed, and then everyone looked at John and clapped, and he rose and was handed the Wally by a woman from NPR who smiled all the way up to her gums, and he took the speech out of his breast pocket and set it on the podium.

He told a joke to start. "There was a famous American naval captain of the War of 1812 who, when his ship went into battle, always wore a red shirt, so that if he was terribly wounded, his men would not see the blood and become demoralized. And now you know why I am wearing brown pants." There were titters in the audience, and a woman in a red suit sitting at a front table rolled her eyes. A poop joke. Oh, my.

The speech was about how public radio, in the midst of the Balkanization of broadcasting, is creating an intelligent centrist voice, *blah blah woof woof* . . . He did a page of that, and the crowd was quiet, and he wished he had told the joke about the engineer going to the guillotine. He plowed through another page—skipping over a long paragraph about a remote tribe of South American aborigines who knew nothing of toothbrushes or mirrors or cameras, who were given a dozen cellular phones, which they incorporated into their religion as sacred totems and instruments of prayer—and went on to talk about the building of WSJO, and then he saw that the rest of the speech was laced with references to that South American tribe, so he had to backtrack and sort of summarize about the cellular-phone thing, which took a while, and he

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fumbled around, and the crowd got restless. They could sense what a flop it was, their blood lust was aroused, they exchanged knowing glances (This is pretty bad, isn't it? Oh, yes, this is a gobbler all right)—and suddenly he was in a sanctimonious passage about public radio as a telephone in a dark forest whereby the brave exchange their messages. (Where did this dreck come from? he thought.) He felt ashamed to be giving a speech this dumb and wasting everyone's time. Shame rose in his throat; he was choking on it. He wanted to stop, if only he could find a stopping place.

And then the woman with the gums passed a note over to him: "Wind it up, thank you." That was disconcerting. He skipped two pages and looked for the paragraph about the funding crisis in public broadcasting—it was in there somewhere. He searched, he skipped another page, he looked up at the audience and grinned and said, "Almost to the end," and then there was a crash, as if someone had dropped a bowling ball.

It was Bob Edwards's head. He was sitting at the main table, two seats away from the podium, and he had rested his chin on his hand and closed his eyes and dozed off, and then his elbow slipped and his head whacked the table. Cups and saucers bounced, and people thought "Coronary"—the voice of NPR's popular *Morning Edition* dead!—and then Bob Edwards raised his head and grinned, and people clapped! They practically gave him an ovation!

John said, "And thank you very much for this fine award" and stuffed the speech in his pocket and turned and hustled

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out of there as fast as he could. Bob Edwards reached out to shake his hand, and so did the woman from *All Things Considered*, but John couldn't bear to talk to anyone. He had said enough.

He fled through a door that said FIRE EXIT, which opened into a concrete-block stairwell; he ran three flights down the stairs, two steps at a time, thinking, "Dumb, dumb, dumb, dumb, dumb!"

One mark of a good general manager must be the ability to give a horse-hockey speech and shrug it off, but this had hit him hard. He felt nauseated and dizzy. He sat down on the stairs in that silent stairwell and leaned his head against the steel rail and felt his heart pound and prepared to vomit. He thought, "You're forty-four years old and you're wasting your life."

He heard a door open above, and two men stepped into the stairwell, and the door closed. One of them said, "What's wrong?" and the other said, "I saw McCullough coming, and I don't want to talk to him, the big dummy. He's been a stone in my shoe for years, and now he's badmouthing my book. What a shithead."

He recognized that voice. It was Jonah Hadley.

The first voice said, "You going up to the suite?"

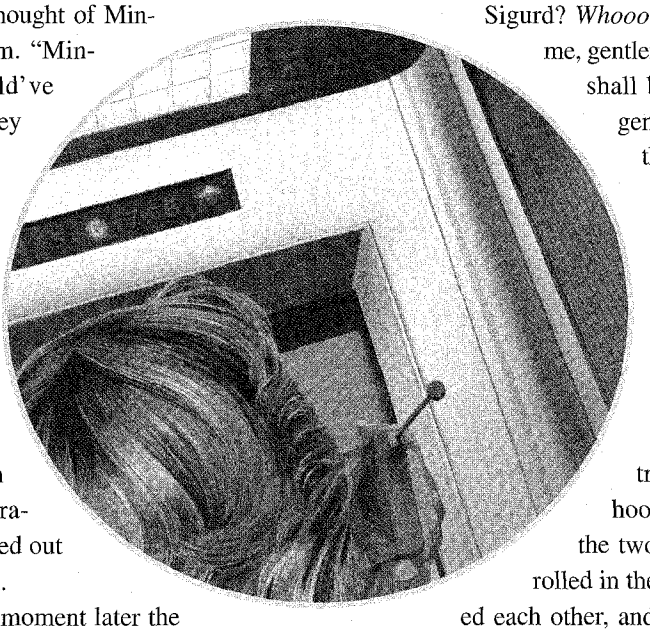
Hadley said, "No, I had enough. I'm going home. Who was that gasbag they gave the Wally to? Geez."

"I dunno. Some jerk from New York. Pretty boring."

"New York City?"

"God, no. Upstate. He's from Minnesota originally."

They both snickered at the thought of Minnesota. Pretty hilarious to them. "Minnesota," Hadley said, "I should've guessed," and they chuckled. They talked about what a snoozefest the conference was, compared with other years, and John's face burned—to be called a gasbag by Jonah Hadley! It was like being called ugly by a tree toad. If Hadley came down the stairs, John thought, he might like to shove a finger in Hadley's chest and tell him that his show was a blight on radio. But then the two men slipped out the same door they had come in.



John sat and felt blue, and a moment later the door opened again and a woman called down, "John? John?" It was Susan Mack. He stood up quietly and tiptoed down the stairs, and then his foot scraped, and she cried, "John? Is something wrong?" and came after him. He ran down five more flights, trying the door at each landing—each one was locked—until he finally escaped into the parking garage. He dashed along the rows of cars toward a far wall that said ELEVATOR and followed the arrow around the corner and punched the UP button and waited. He felt like a jewel thief. He was perspiring. He took the elevator up to the lobby, jammed with bodies, and made a sharp right turn toward the hotel elevators, where four security men stood, dazed from tedium. "You with the convention?" one of them asked. John nodded. A light flashed, a bell dinged, the doors opened, and he got on the elevator. He squeezed into the corner, behind a tall blonde in cool sunglasses, wearing articles of clothing not sold to members of the general public. Her breasts, visible on three sides, brushed against his arm; they felt like molded plastic. An immense shoulder bag hung under one arm, the sort that women in public relations carry, and she was talking on a cellular phone. "Everything's running late," she said. "Some creep stood up and talked about nothing for half an hour."

DRIVING north that afternoon, passing trucks on the New Jersey Turnpike, he thought about his dumb life pushing a desk. What a wimpy, wasted life it was, compared with the life his ancestors had led in Minnesota. They worked in the fields all day, and at night they built a blazing fire and drank and challenged one another to fight for the fun of it. A straightforward deal compared with office politics. You didn't go to meetings and sit wooden-faced in the downpour of bullshit: you drained your whiskey bottle and stripped off your shirt and whooped, "*Whoooooooo-haw!* What fool among you dares to engage in a test of manhood with me, the unbeatable Sigurd? *Whoooooooooooo—yeow*. Look upon me, gentlemen, and see what the standard shall be! A farmer and a Christian gentleman, and one who can beat the living crap out of any one of you. Who would prove me wrong?" And then a younger man stepped into the circle and whipped off his shirt and eyed you up and down and said, "Sigurd, a wounded skunk on a country road has a greater understanding of trucks than you have of manhood," and with a ferocious roar the two of you fell into a clinch and rolled in the dirt and sandburs and pounded each other, and finally, when it was enough, the others separated you and stood you up, and the bottle was passed, and you grasped each other's hand and grunted, "Huh." Which meant that you were true brothers and your fight meant nothing at all except that you loved to fight.

Those men were giants compared with him, a privileged little pissant who stood up and blathered in public. Why hadn't he just said "Thank you" and sat down? He imagined

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how it would be to pull over to the side of the road, write a farewell note ("I am sorry. I tried hard to resist this conclusion, but it is unavoidable"), leave it on the dashboard, steal a boat from a marina, paddle out to the middle of the river, tie the anchor to his ankle, and pitch himself into the water and let his life be quietly obliterated. There would be a surge of adrenaline at first, and he would struggle like a dervish, but down he'd go, under the waves, and oblivion would come quickly. It was interesting to think of this, knowing that he wouldn't do it.

He thought of the men back home who parked themselves at night in the Sidetrack Tap, that dark, warm cave of beer and smoke, the Norwegian bachelor farmers at their end of the bar, the gentry at the other, and the contempt they all shared for men like John, fools in suits doing rat's-ass work in offices, work that didn't make a dime's worth of difference to anybody, the work of con artists, snake-oil salesmen—managers. His dad, back when he ran the grain elevator, came home from a visit to an agriconglomerate in Minneapolis once and said, "Dullest people you ever saw—daylight is wasted on them." Some vice-president had invited him into his big carpeted office with plate-glass windows and a panoramic view of the Mississippi River gorge, and John's father was deeply unimpressed. "Young guy with a moustache, suit and a tie, shoes with tassels, poufy hair, dumb laugh, you know the type. Sits down and right away it's first names, like you're pals. Talks your head off, and—boy oh boy—there's nothing going on upstairs. The guy is all foam and no beer. All wax and no wick. A rocket without a payload."

That's me, John thought. One more self-important lummox hurtling through space, trying to make an impact somewhere. He didn't want to be a general manager anymore: he wanted to be something good. His ancestors knew how to walk away from a bad deal. They looked around them in Norway and saw it would be fifteen years before they inherited a piece of the farm and it'd be a woeful and backbreaking fifteen years and the piece would be too small. They did not agonize over it, did not go into therapy, keep a journal, or call up talk shows; they simply headed for America. When some of them got to the Midwest and saw that they had exchanged one bad deal for another, and then heard about gold in California, chunks of gold that lay in streambeds for a man to scoop up with his bare hands, they set down their tools in the yard and walked away without hesitation, seeing their chance to break out of the traces.

IN a few months WSJO would change over from Haydn and Beethoven and Puccini to *The Gay-Lesbian Parenting Hour* at 1:00 P.M. and *The Men Dealing With Anger Hour* at 1:15, *The Hearing Impaired Hour* at 1:30, *Wounded Nephews of Distant Uncles* at 1:45, *People in Grief for Deceased Pets* at 2:00, *The Herpes Hour* at 2:15, *People in Search of Closure* at 2:30, each with its own smug host and tiny clientele, its own style of vacuity, and should John fight this? No, he did not think so.

Fighting was noble in theory, but when you looked at the lives of battling visionaries—Joe Hill, Susan B. Anthony, Eugene Debs, Carry Nation, Father Coughlin, Dorothy Day, Martin Luther King, Ralph Nader, Newt Gingrich—you saw the price they paid, the loss of the private self, and how the inner fire that drove them to battle also made them not much fun to be with. Joe Hill's wife, Jill, married a florist after Joe's execution and happily gave up the labor movement for a life of Girl Scouting and literary teas in Muncie, Indiana, and hoped never to hear the word "solidarity" ever again. Eugene Debs, five-time Socialist candidate for President, was divorced by his wife, Debbie, who said that marriage to a great man was about as enjoyable as sleeping in a bed full of dead fish, and she found happiness raising Pomeranians and later playing Aunt Sis on *Friendly Neighbors*. Dorothy Day's husband, Ray, never accompanied her on her Catholic Worker tours or walked the picket line; his great passions were raising orchids and weaving baskets and maintaining his collection of Deanna Durbin memorabilia. Besides, he was a Congregationalist. Ralph Nader's wife, Nadine, tired of her husband's abstemiousness and fled to Santa Barbara and opened a gift shop. And poor Gingrich. The cost of leading the Republican revolution was to become a man nobody but major donors cared to eat dinner with. Gingrich's first wife, Ginger, said that Newt was unable to focus on conversations about topics other than himself, that he was afraid of small children and shrank back from them as if accosted by porcupines.

John got home, toddled up to bed, and switched on his radio, and there was a woman calling in, whose daughter created original silk-screen T-shirts, saying what a hard time talented people have in our society and they never get the recognition they deserve. A man called in to say he suffered from chronic leg cramps. "I don't think people realize what a rough time people have who don't quite qualify as handicapped. I mean, I have to park way at the other end of the lot even though my leg hurts like heck sometimes, so I can't attend as many athletic or cultural events as I'd like because I never know if those leg cramps might kick in suddenly, and I'm just saying I wish there were a little more public understanding."

The host thanked him for his comments, and then a guy with a quiet, whiny voice talked about how alone he felt in the world. "Hey," John thought, "the reason you're alone is that people who know you don't like you that much." He thought of calling in and saying, "I wish there were more public understanding of guys like me. I like to walk around town in pink pants and lead my wolverine on a leash and sing 'Whistle While You Work' in falsetto, and I am hurting no one by this, but people look at me as if I were a monster. Why is life like this?" But before he could reach for the phone, he fell asleep.

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DIRE CURE

by WILLIAM MATTHEWS

"First, do no harm," the Hippocratic
Oath begins, but before she might enjoy
such balm, the docs had to harm her tumor.
It was large, rare, and so anomalous
in its behavior that at first they mis-
diagnosed it. "Your wife will die of it
within a year." But in ten days or so
I sat beside her bed with hot-and-sour
soup and heard an intern congratulate
her on her new diagnosis: a children's

cancer (doesn't that possessive break
your heart?) had possessed her. I couldn't stop
personifying it. Devious, dour,
it had a clouded heart, like Iago's.
It loved disguise. It was a garrison
in a captured city, a bad horror film
(*The Blob*), a stowaway, an inside job.
If I could make it be like something else,
I wouldn't have to think of it as what,
in fact, it was: part of my lovely wife.

Next, then, chemotherapy. Her hair fell
out in tufts, her color dulled, she sat laced
to bags of poison she endured somewhat
better than her cancer cells could, though not
by much. And indeed, the cancer cells waned
more slowly than the chemical "cocktails"
(one the bright color of Campari), as the chemo
nurses called them, dripped into her. There were
three hundred days of this: a week inside
the hospital and two weeks out, the fierce

elixirs percolating all the while.
She did five weeks of radiation, too,
Monday to Friday like a stupid job.
She wouldn't eat the food the hospital
wheeled in. "Pureed fish" and "minced fish" were worth,
I thought, a sharp surge of food snobbery,
but she'd grown averse to it all—the nurses'
crepe soles' muffled squeaks along the hall,
the filtered air, the smothered urge to read,
the fear, the perky visitors, flowers

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she'd not been sent when she was well, the room-
mate (what do "semiprivate" and "extra
virgin" have in common?) who died, the nights
she wept and sweated faster than the tubes
could moisten her with lurid poison.
One chemotherapy veteran, six
years in remission, chanced on her former
chemo nurse at a bus stop and threw up.
My wife's tumor has not come back.
I like to think of it in Tumor Hell

strapped to a dray, flat as a deflated
football, bleak and nubbled like a poorly
ironed truffle. There's one tense in Tumor Hell:
forever, or what we call the present.
For that long the flaccid tumor marinates
in lurid toxins. Tumor Hell Clinic
is, it turns out, a teaching hospital.
Every century or so, the way
we'd measure it, a chief doc brings a pack
of students round. They run some simple tests:

surge current through the tumor, batter it
with mallets, push a wood-plane across its
pebbled hide and watch a scurf of tumor-
pelt kink loose from it, impale it, strafe it
with lye and napalm. There might be nothing
left in there but a still space surrounded
by a carapace. "This one is nearly
dead," the chief doc says. "What's the cure for that?"
The students know: "Kill it slower, of course."
They sprinkle it with rock salt and move on.

Here on the aging earth the tumor's gone:
My wife is hale, though wary, and why not?
Once you've had cancer, you don't get headaches
anymore, you get brain tumors, at least
until the aspirin kicks in. Her hair's back,
her weight, her appetite. "And what about you?"
friends ask me. First the fear felt like sudden
weightlessness: I couldn't steer and couldn't stay.
I couldn't concentrate: surely my spit would
dry before I could slather a stamp.

I made a list of things to do next day
before I went to bed, slept like a cork,
woke to no more memory of last night's
list than smoke has of fire, made a new list,
began to do the things on it, wept, paced,
berated myself, drove to the hospital,
and brought my wife food from the takeout joints
that ring a hospital as surely as
brothels surround a gold strike. I drove home
rancid with anger at her luck and mine—

anger that filled me the same way nature
hates a vacuum. "This must be hell for you,"
some said. Hell's not other people: Sartre
was wrong about that, too. *L'enfer, c'est moi?*
I've not got the ego for it. There'd be
no hell if Dante hadn't built a model
of his rage so well, and he contrived to
get exiled from it, for it was Florence.
Why would I live in hell? I love New York.
Some even said the tumor and fierce cure

were harder on the care giver—yes, they
said "care giver"—than on the "sick person."
They were wrong who said those things. Of course
I hated it, but some of "it" was me—
the self-pity I allowed myself,
the brave poses I struck. The rest was dire
threat my wife met with moral stubbornness,
terror, rude jokes, nausea, you name it.
No, let her think of its name and never
say it, as if it were the name of God.

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THE NEAR-MYTH OF OUR FAILING SCHOOLS

BY PETER SCHRAG

Ideologically inspired lamentations about the parlous state of American education mask the much more complex truth

IN the spring of 1991, as warnings accumulated that America's second-rate schools were dooming the nation to permanent failure in the global economy, systems analysts at Sandia National Laboratories, a federal institution of generally impeccable reputation, compiled a lengthy report showing that the picture in American education was far more complex—and in many respects a great deal less gloomy—than the rhetoric of alarm allowed. But for two years the report—a collection of tables and statistics on everything from dropout rates and SAT scores to college degrees awarded in engineering and other technical fields—was buried by the Department of Energy, which had commissioned it. The document, said James Watkins, George Bush's Secretary of Energy, was "dead wrong," and would be regarded as "a call for complacency at a time when just the opposite is required." It had a small underground circulation, but even after the Clinton Administration finally released it, in 1993, neither the Sandia data nor similar findings from other sources got much attention. Mixed reports don't make for good headlines, and qualified good news undermines the sense of crisis essential both to liberal demands for more money and to conservative arguments that only vouchers and other radical solutions will do. Good news, even qualified good news, runs counter to the conventional wisdom and undermines almost everybody's agenda of reform.

It was always thus: in the late 1950s, after the launching of *Sputnik*; in the early 1980s, after publication of the federal report *A Nation at Risk*, which warned that the failures of the nation's schools were about to undermine America's ability to compete economically; in 1989, when President George Bush and the nation's governors initiated what came to be called Goals 2000, pledging to make this country the world leader in education by the year 2000; in 1993, when President Bill Clinton and a Democratic Congress followed that up with legislation to develop voluntary national standards in English, history, science, and other fields; and in 1995–1996, when that same effort collapsed in controversy and dispute over the standards that were produced.

Now, as President Clinton is calling yet again for higher school standards, and for a program of national testing in reading and math, the same assumptions of crisis and failure that have fueled every other recent reform debate are being invoked. The debate is driven once again by our favorite myths: that there was once a golden age, an era when schools maintained rigorous academic standards, when all children learned, when few dropped out and most graduated on time; that sometime in the past generation or so (most commonly pegged to the 1960s) the system began to fall apart under a siege of social promotion, grade inflation, and progressive mush that is leaving America helpless against superior foreign education; and that the large amounts of new money that have gone to the schools in the past generation have largely been wasted. House Speaker Newt Gingrich and the University of California regent Ward Connerly, who spearheaded California's drive against race-based affirmative action, wrote in a recent *New York Times* op-ed piece,

> The education bureaucracy won't concede that, despite spending trillions of dollars on education over the past 30 years, American children are further behind today. It doesn't want to admit that the S.A.T. scores of African-Ameri-

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can children, which average 100 points less than the scores of white children, are the direct result of the current [Great Society] policies.

In some places, circumstances, and contexts, some of those criticisms are correct. Many schools are academically flabby, mindless, and laced with an anti-intellectualism sometimes bordering on outright sabotage; some are wastelands of crime, drugs, and despair; many are afflicted by multicultural fashion and politically correct clichés. Some are run by arrogant, rigid bureaucracies or crippled by unions that make it impossible to move any teacher with seniority, let alone fire the bad ones, and classrooms are often without a regular teacher for the first month of school while the seniority system slowly determines who may be assigned where. Many schools don't demand nearly as much as they should. But many others suffer from few of those things, and without a more realistic sense of what is going on—a better understanding of the myths—the country will never get beyond the horror stories and ideological set pieces that seem endlessly to dominate the education debate.

MISLEADING STATISTICS AND COMPARISONS

AMONG the Sandia findings, many of them corroborated by other studies, are the following: High school completion rates—now roughly 90 percent—and college graduation rates are the highest in history. One in four adult Americans has at least a bachelor's degree—the highest percentage in the world (and the percentage keeps getting higher). A larger percentage of twenty-two-year-olds receive degrees in math, science, or engineering in the United States than in any of the nation's major economic competitors. Although SAT verbal scores declined over the years 1975 to 1990, the decline occurred chiefly because a larger percentage of lower-ranking students (those from the bottom half of their school classes) began taking the test. If the same population that took the SATs in 1975 had taken them this year, the average score would be significantly higher than it was then—and higher than it was in 1990.

Because of reforms instituted in the 1980s, more American high school students than ever before are taking four years of English and at least three years of math and science. Far more are taking and passing Advanced Placement examinations (98,000 in 1978 and 535,000 in 1996). More teachers, for all the flaws in our teacher training-and-reward system, are subject to tough standards for certification and promotion.

To be sure, as the Sandia report recognized, on tests like the Third International Mathematics and Science Study and other international comparisons of academic achievement American students continue to score lower than their peers in Singapore, Taiwan, Japan, Korea, and elsewhere. Whereas parents of high-achieving students in Japan or China worry that their children are not doing well enough and ought to work still harder, among parents of American students who are scoring far less well on the same tests "satisfaction with . . . students' achievement and education remains high and standards remain low," according to a team led by the University of Michigan psychologist Harold W. Stevenson. "Innate ability [not diligence or high expectations] continues to be emphasized by Ameri-

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cans as a basis for achievement." Stevenson's collaborator James Stigler, of the University of California at Los Angeles, has found an academic intensity in Japanese classes that is almost unthinkable in this country. Many American universities, including even as selective an institution as the University of California, continue to provide remedial courses to their freshmen: a quarter of the students entering UCLA are required to take what used to be called bonehead English, and nearly a third of those entering the University of California system as a whole are.

But as Iris Rotberg, a professor at George Washington University, points out, cross-cultural comparisons of academic achievement are tough to make. Many countries begin specialized education at age fourteen or even earlier, which means that some students have already left school and many others have begun cramming for (in the words of the Sandia report) the "life determining tests . . . that specify their eventual position in the workforce." Many lower-achieving students in Great Britain and other countries have by age seventeen already been tracked into job-training programs or have simply left school and thus are not included in the test samples, making comparisons meaningless. (For example, England and Wales rank near the bottom in international math comparisons of eighth-grade students; in comparisons of twelfth-graders, only six percent of whom in England take math, they rank near the top.) Intense competition in places like Singapore and Japan for good university slots and other rewards that will have consequences for a lifetime must wonderfully concentrate the mind.

The late Albert Shanker, for many years the president of the American Federation of Teachers, argued persuasively that the fierce competition in other countries is hardly an excuse for a U.S. system in which academic success or failure has so few consequences—for either teachers or students—and in which so little fosters intense academic effort. Even the best American students, he argued, do not perform as well as their peers elsewhere. Questions that all college-bound nineteen-year-olds in France or Great Britain are expected to answer would be impossible for most graduating seniors here. But the debate ought to make the complexity and ambiguities of the larger issue obvious enough. Which is better for the student—to have the discipline that intense competition for relatively few college openings brings, or to have ample opportunity?

MISLEADING HISTORICAL COMPARISONS

WHAT is true of cross-cultural comparisons is even more emphatically true of historical ones. Precisely when was the golden age of American education that the conventional wisdom assumes existed? Was it in the early years of this century, when, as the education historian Colin Greer pointed out years ago, "All minority groups, white as well as black, with the exceptions of the English, Scots, Germans, and Scandinavians, were negatively portrayed" in American textbooks; when "Jews, Italians, Chinese and blacks were mean, criminal, immoral, drunken, sly, lazy, and stupid in varying degrees"? Was it in the 1920s, when most students never went beyond the eighth grade, when large numbers of children, especially in the South, never went to school at all from April to November, and when no one had ever heard of any such concept as the dropout rate? Was it in the 1930s and 1940s, when even the more enlightened medical schools had strict quotas for Jews and blacks, and the others systematically excluded them, as did a great many other educational institutions as well? Was it in the 1950s, when the historian Arthur Bestor published *Educational Wastelands: The Retreat From Learning in Our Public Schools* (reissued, significantly, in a new edition in 1985), when Rudolf Flesch's *Why Johnny Can't Read* was long a best seller, and when the schools were thought to be failing because, with the launching of *Sputnik*, the Russians had beaten us into space? Was it in 1963, when Admiral Hyman Rickover published *American Education, a National Failure*?

Consider our contemporary why-Johnny-can't-read arguments. In 1987 Chester Finn and Diane Ravitch, two of the country's most thoughtful conservative school critics, published a set of statistics and related data about what American students don't know about their own history and literature. The book title took the form of a question, *What Do Our 17-Year-Olds Know?*, and the answer was unequivocal. "If there were such a thing as a national report card," Finn and Ravitch wrote, "then we would have to say that this nationally representative sample of 11th-grade students earns failing marks in both subjects." But as at least some parents have noticed, and as Gerald Bracey, a prolific debunker of schools-are-failing stories, reported in the journal *Phi Delta Kappan* in March of 1995, students may in fact know more than their parents and grandparents do. In any case, Bracey

Good news undermines the sense of crisis essential both to liberal demands for more money and to conservative arguments for vouchers and other radical solutions.

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showed, such complaints are hardly new. In 1943 *The New York Times*, citing findings by the historian Allan Nevins, reported its shock at discovering that

> a large majority of [college] students showed that they had virtually no knowledge of elementary aspects of American history [and] could not identify such names as Abraham Lincoln, Thomas Jefferson, Andrew Jackson, or Theodore Roosevelt. . . . Some students believed that George Washington was president during the War of 1812. . . . St. Louis was placed on the Pacific Ocean, Lake Huron, Lake Erie, the Atlantic Ocean, Ohio River, and almost every place else.

Similarly, the college students described Walt Whitman as a missionary, a pioneer, a colonizer, an unpatriotic writer, a humorist, an English poet, and (not surprising in the days of Paul Whiteman) a band leader. Plus ça change . . .

Chester Finn and like-minded people point to scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), widely considered to be among the most reliable measures of academic achievement, to show how little progress has been made from the late 1970s to the present, despite the orgy of curricular reforms and the growing amounts of money that have been appropriated for K–12 schools in most states over the past decade. But rarely do these people point to the changing demographics of the American school—the growing proportion of students whose native language is something other than English (now more than 25 percent in California, and nearly half in Los Angeles), and the growing proportion of students from poor or one-parent families. A Rand analysis of the same NAEP scores, issued in December of 1994, shows that although overall scores for students aged thirteen and seventeen didn't rise much from 1970 to 1990, scores for all ethnic subgroups were up (three percentage points for whites, eleven points for Hispanics, nineteen points for blacks). And although one reason for that change was that the parents were better educated (in 1970, 38 percent of mothers had not finished high school; in 1990 the figure was 17 percent), Rand's researchers concluded that the gains for blacks and Hispanics were larger than any change in family characteristics could explain. Whether the gains were a direct effect or a second-generation effect of the parents' better schooling, public investment, contrary to the conservative critics, had made a difference.

CONTRADICTORY OBJECTIVES

THAT the same charges now being directed at the schools were leveled a half century ago is hardly reason to ignore them, but it does say something about those myths. Editorials in *The Wall Street Journal*, a newspaper long devoted to the cause of school vouchers, often complain that Americans spend more per pupil in their public schools than the French or the Germans and get less in return. But what goes unmentioned is that the French and the Germans spend more on health and child care, public transportation, and related social services (not counted in their school spending, though it often is part of ours), and that theirs are for the most part still monocultural societies with less social pathology. Nor is it generally recognized that most of the growth in American school spending in the past three decades has gone for special education for the ballooning numbers of students officially considered handicapped or disabled, a designation that hardly existed in the years immediately after the Second World War. The Sandia report estimates that from 1960 to 1988 constant-dollar spending for "regular" students increased by 39 percent per pupil while spending for all students increased by roughly 150 percent. The difference is almost entirely accounted for by special education, which, as the report points out, can have little impact on average performance on national standardized tests. (Among unfunded federal mandates special education, which diverts huge sums from the regular classroom, is certainly one of the most costly.)

None of this is meant to deny the system's enormous problems and failures—crime, drugs, arteriosclerotic bureaucracies, self-serving unions, de-

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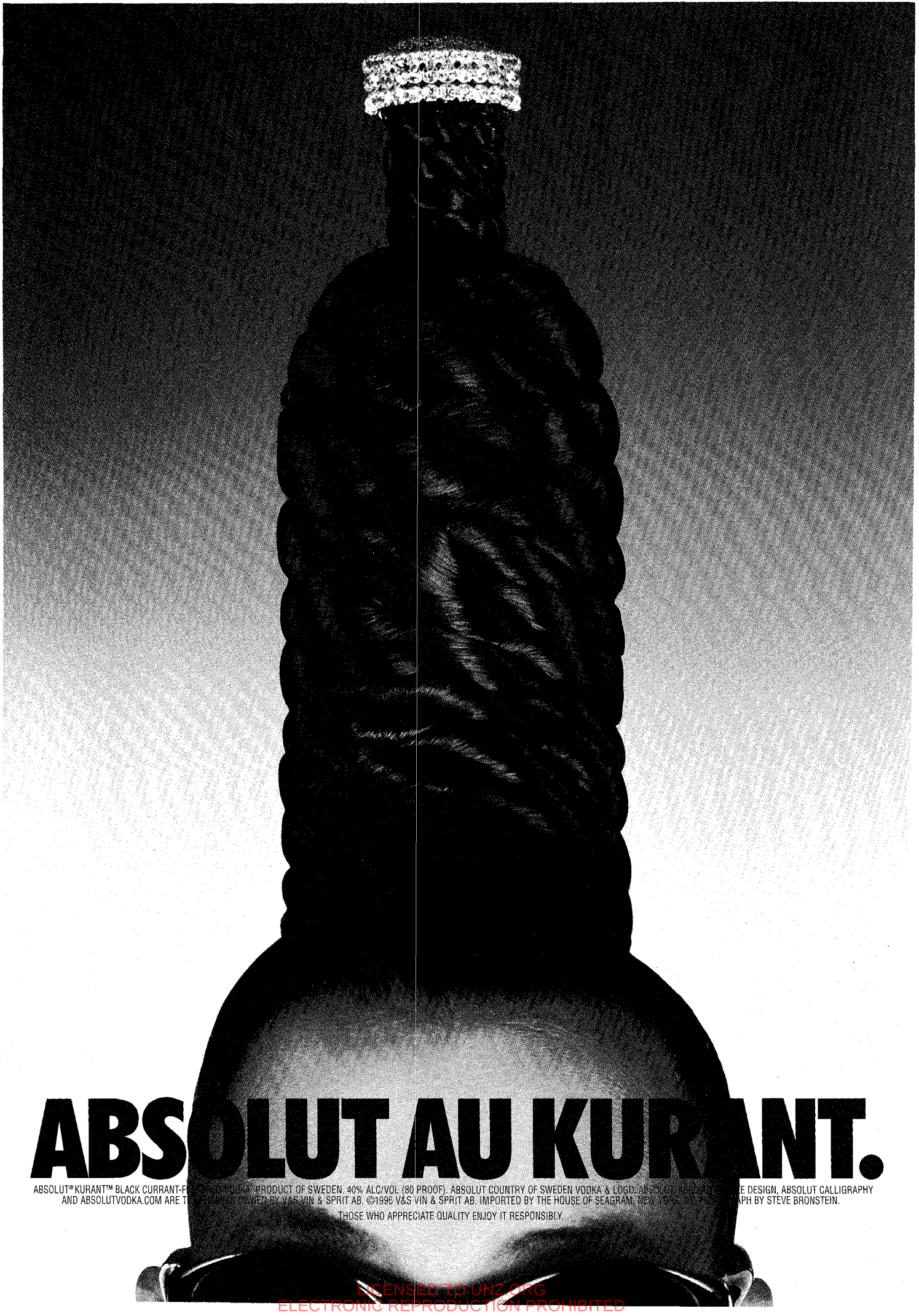

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Another myth is that Americans really do want schools with high academic standards, and would get them if the education establishment didn't stand in their way.

caying facilities, vocational-education programs a half century out of date—or to suggest that all our students are doing splendidly. Despite the glories of a higher-education system that, even after the sharp tuition increases and the cutbacks in public funding of the past few years, is still the world's most accessible and abundant, Albert Shanker was right: as long as so few real rewards are given for distinction and so few real penalties exacted for failure, the educational process will tend to remain lackadaisical and inefficient. The question is whether Americans will ever tolerate anything more demanding. Equally important, the schools are so riven with contradictory objectives—merit versus inclusion, for example—and so loaded down with extraneous social mandates for everything from drug education and AIDS counseling to diversity training and social awareness (often imposed by the same politicians who complain about school failure) that it's a wonder anyone learns anything. But flat generalizations about crisis and failure, the superiority of foreign schools, or the glorious past will do nothing to solve the problems.

WHO WANTS RIGOR?

WHICH brings us to yet another myth: that Americans—and parents in particular—really do want schools with high academic standards, and would get them if the education establishment didn't stand in their way. In *Inside American Education* (1993) Thomas Sowell, of the Hoover Institution, listed the usual complaints, from the travesties of sex education and the overemphasis on school sports to the pressure for political correctness in curricula. But if he had ever been to a school-board meeting where someone proposed making it harder for students with bad grades to play football, he'd know that it's not only educationists who foist this stuff on the system. Ross Perot's first great public campaign—for tougher school standards in Texas—wasn't against teachers but against ordinary folks all across Texas. The censors and the enemies of high standards come as often from outside the system as from inside. They may be religious fundamentalists fighting the teaching of evolution or demanding equal time for creationism in science programs, or complaining about witches and secular humanism in reading textbooks and dirty words in novels. They may be gays complaining that Michelangelo and Tchaikovsky are not identified in the history books as homosexual, or black self-esteemers blocking the adoption of updated history texts because they're short on the civilizations of Africa (even though the older texts don't mention them at all). They may be civil-rights groups demanding that *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* be taken out of the syllabus because it contains the word "nigger," or opposing tougher standards because they fear that more poor children will fail. Clinton's new proposal for national testing is already under assault from groups that include the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund and FairTest on the left, and the Christian Coalition and Phyllis Schlafly's Eagle Forum on the right. (The right, Chester Finn has said, doesn't like anything with the word "national" in it; the left doesn't like anything with the word "testing.") In addition, groups all across the spectrum have fought over the content and requirements of every form of educational testing, asserting that the SAT is biased against minorities and women, that the (now defunct) California CLAS test was too intrusive into the personal lives of students and their families and didn't focus enough on the basics, that yet another test simply demands too much. And then there are the age-old fights (in and outside the schools) about phonics versus whole language, math facts versus constructivism, progressivism versus drill-and-kill. Of course the school establishment is not an innocent in these things, but it is hardly the only culprit. Virtually every national poll shows that although only a fifth of Americans rate the nation's public schools very highly, some 70 percent of us think that the schools our own children attend are doing just fine—a phenomenon that Finn calls "retail complacency." We could be wrong on either count, or on both, but things are obviously not quite as simple as the rhetoric of failure suggests. Anti-intellectualism is as American as apple pie.

THE WEAK ECONOMIC ARGUMENT

THERE was a time when American schools were known for their successes: the children of immigrants who made it to City College or Columbia or Harvard and went on to have professional careers. Dropouts and failures simply vanished into the large market for unskilled labor. Now the schools tend to be known for their failures: dropouts, kids who bring guns to school, students who score lower than their counterparts abroad. We forget that we are trying to take children from an unprecedented array of ethnic

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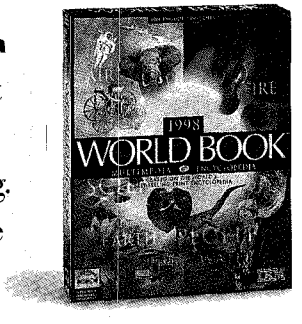

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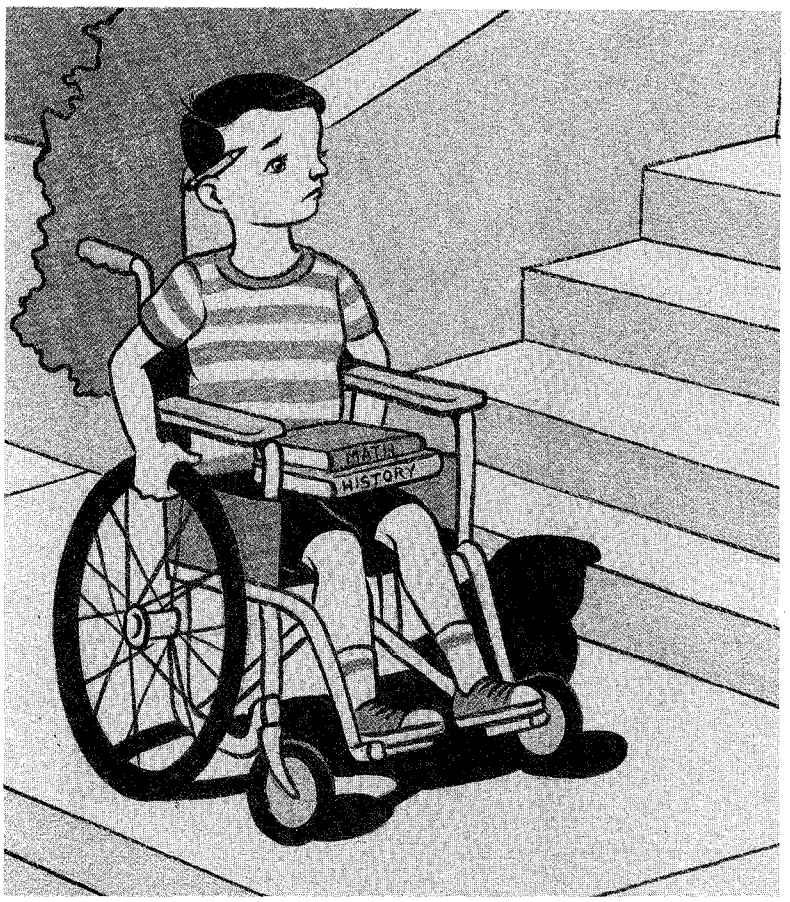

and cultural backgrounds, many of them speaking little or no English, and educate them all to a level of sophistication never imagined for so large a proportion of any population.

A few years ago our presumed failure to do that was blamed for what was regarded as the nation's slipping competitiveness against the Germans and the Japanese, but now that the business pages—and the front pages, too—are celebrating a triumphant economic recovery, no one credits the schools. The old litany simply continues. In 1995, at yet another "national summit" in Washington on "world-class education for all America's children," business people blithely reiterated that American students were being insufficiently educated for the global economy in which they will have to survive. All assumed that if young people were well enough educated, great jobs would await them; none seemed concerned that since 1979, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, real wages have declined for all men except those with more education than four years of college. The business people did not mention that increasing numbers of college graduates were doing jobs that required no college training at all—that, as *Phi Delta Kappan* reported a couple of years ago, the number of college-educated door-to-door salesmen, for example, grew from 57,000 in 1983 to 75,000 in 1990, and the number of bus drivers with bachelor's degrees rose from 99,000 to 166,000. The job market for college graduates has surely improved with the economic recovery, but the boom will not last forever either.

In 1995, when the University of Illinois surveyed its 1994 graduates about whether their college training was being put to good use, nearly 40 percent said they regarded themselves as overqualified. In the early 1990s Sam Ginn, the chairman of Pacific Telesis, went around California talking about how his company had given seventh-grade reading tests to 6,400 applicants for operator positions and only 2,700 had passed. He didn't point out that the jobs paid less than $7.00 an hour, or that since the company had only 700 jobs to offer, there were almost four qualified applicants for every available slot. For such problems a lot of fixes are needed, many of them only remotely connected with the schools.

The Stanford University educationist Larry Cuban may well have been right when he said, "The myth of better schools as the engine for a leaner, stronger economy was a scam from the very beginning." Yet even if he wasn't, economic recovery has changed the basis for argument. It's hard to read without embarrassment a statement like the one from *A Nation at Risk* about how the country must reform its educational system "if only to keep and improve on the slim competitive edge that we still retain in world markets." But the obsolescence of the economic rationale hardly weakens the case for better schools and higher standards, particularly in the inner cities, from which a disproportionate number of the nation's school failures have always come. On the contrary, it returns our attention to the broader case for good public education—the desirability of a liberally educated community, Thomas Jefferson's argument about the importance of an enlightened citizenry, the desperate need to end our cycles of poverty and to apply resources accordingly. But those objectives require a far more realistic appreciation of what we have done in our educational system in the past, what we are doing now, and what we think we want to do. Despite the problems encountered by Goals 2000 and Clinton's national-standards effort, the trend of the past few years—surely a healthy one—has been to find ways to set broad goals and standards, and to free local schools and teachers to accomplish them in their own ways. But those things can be done only if we can see the results without ideological blinders, if the tests and assessments we use really measure what we want to know, and if we have the confidence to support the schools that this society needs. A growing number of people, in the name of world-class standards, would abandon, through vouchers, privatization, and other means, the idea of the common school altogether. Before we do that, we'd better be sure that things are really as bad as we assume. The dumbest thing we could do is scrap what we're doing right.

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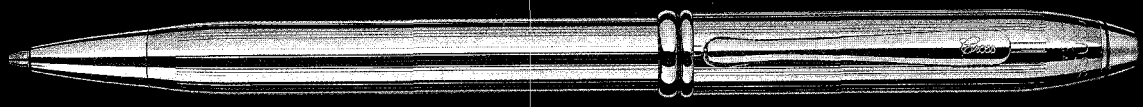

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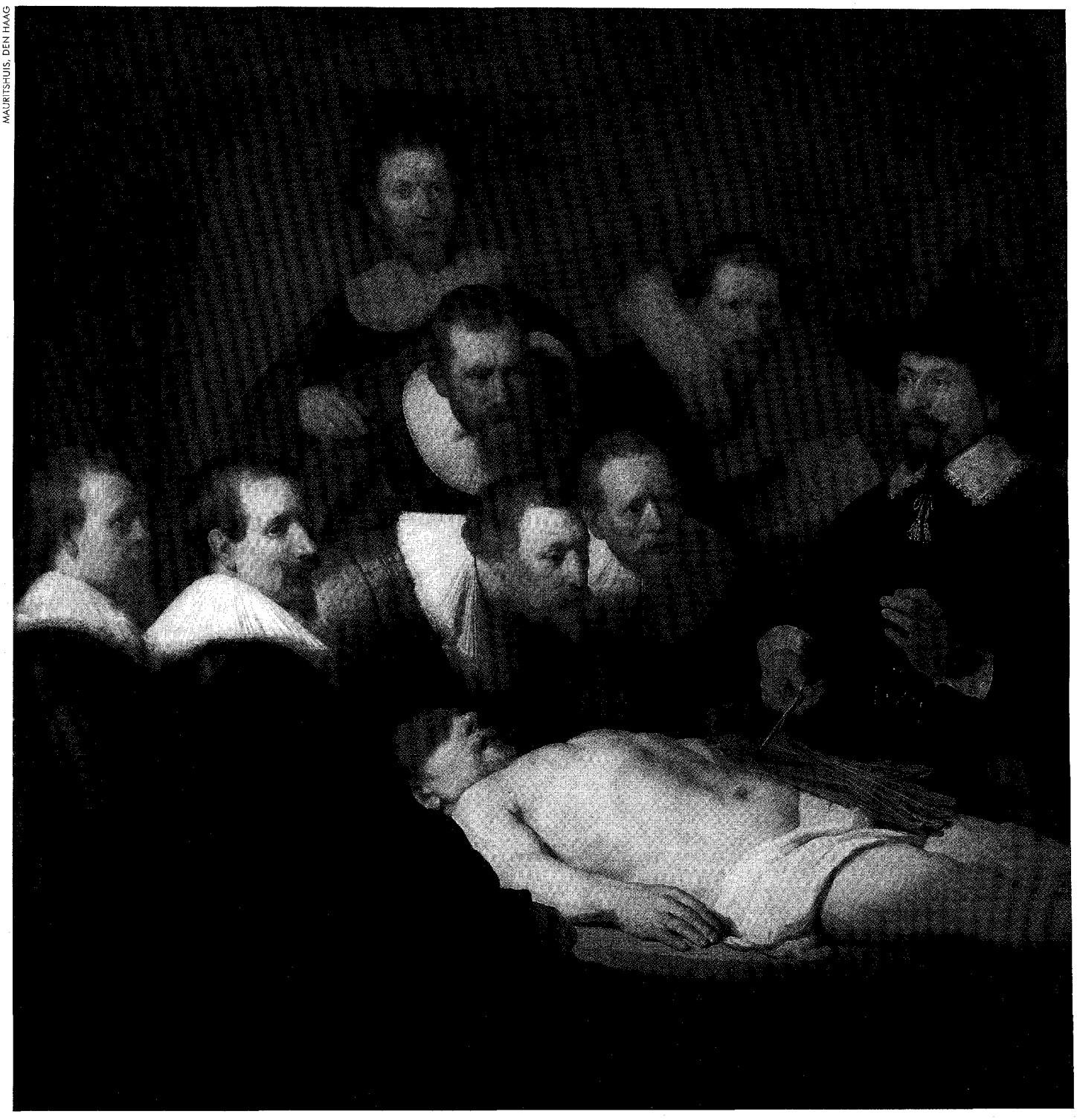

Looking at Rembrandt between sessions of the Yugoslav war-crimes

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by LAWRENCE WESCHLER

tribunal in The Hague

DURING my first few months covering the ongoing Yugoslav war-crimes tribunal in The Hague, faced day after day with the appalling sorts of testimony that have become that court's standard fare,

FREDDY ALBORTA

I took to repairing as often as possible to the nearby Mauritshuis, so as to commune with the museum's three Vermeers. *Diana and Her Companions*, the *Girl With a Pearl Earring*, the *View of Delft*: astonishing, their capacity to lavish such a centered serenity upon any who come into their purview.

More recently, however, I've increasingly found myself being drawn toward the next room over, the one that houses Rembrandt's *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicholaes Tulp*, a work from the generation immediately prior to Vermeer's. It was painted in 1632, the very year of Vermeer's birth (the year, for that matter, of John Locke's birth, and Spinoza's as well), when Rembrandt, newly arrived in Amsterdam, was only twenty-six years old. With this astonishing work he was brashly hanging out his shingle as an accomplished portraitist. The year 1632 was just about the midpoint of the Thirty Years' War, an incredibly vicious religious struggle that savaged Northern Europe with carnage every bit as harrowing as anything being described nowadays at the tribunal—mayhem that regularly slashed into the Netherlands, until the conflict was finally brought to a (provisional) end with the Treaty of Westphalia, in 1648. The war had provided the occasion for the publication, in 1625, of the seminal work by an earlier son of Vermeer's Delft, Hugo Grotius: *On the Law of War and Peace*, a text often considered to be the foundation of all modern international law, in particular of the Hague tribunals. The war's dark imperatives can likewise be seen impinging on Rembrandt's great painting.

The Anatomy Lesson is so famously overexposed, so crusted over with conventional regard, as to be almost impossible to see afresh. And indeed, when I recently came upon the painting once again, rather than seeing it I found myself recalling an essay I hadn't thought about in almost thirty years—the English critic John Berger's 1967 rumination on the occasion of Che Guevara's death. Responding to the simultaneous appearance seemingly all over the world of that ghastly photo of Che's felled body, stretched out half naked across a bare surface and surrounded by the proud Bolivian officers and soldiers who had succeeded in bagging the revolutionary leader, Berger made a startling connection to Rembrandt's *Anatomy Lesson*. Gee, I remember thinking at the time, this man doesn't look at his morning paper the way I look at mine. But surely he was right. One could even say that Rembrandt's was the image, almost hard-wired into the photographer's mind and the soldiers' very bodies, that had taught them all where to stand in relation to one another and to the grim object of their smug display.

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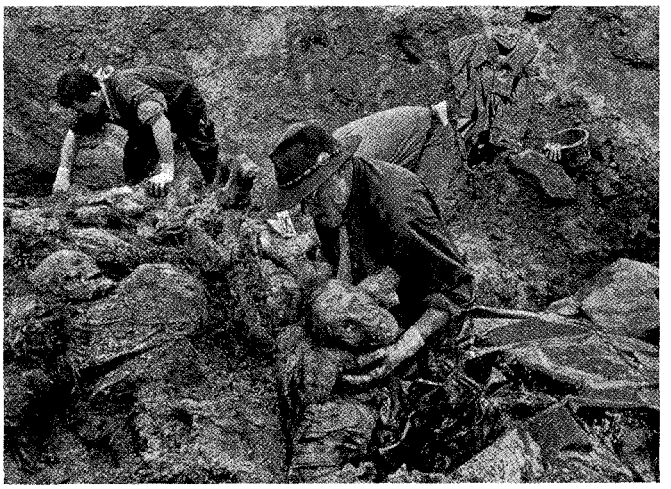
AND yet now, standing before the painting itself, I realized that for all my conventional acquaintance with its image, I'd never seen it correctly—or, anyway, my memory was wrong in one crucial respect. The professor is poised in mid-lecture beside a cadaver, its left forearm splayed open to reveal all the sinewy musculature just beneath the skin. There is a mountain of onlookers: some gaze out strangely toward us while the rest—and this is the part I remembered most vividly—lean forward, gawking (like us) at all that gore. (Come to think of it, maybe the ones gazing toward us are staring precisely at our own queasiness in the face of such morbidity.)

Only, as I now could plainly see, that's not what's actually happening in Rembrandt's canvas. Of course, the theme of mortality and morbidity is there—rendered all the more unsettling by the conspicuous resemblance between the cadaver's face and those of many of the onlookers. But that's not what the onlookers are focusing on; death (their own or anybody else's) hardly seems to be on their minds at all. On the contrary, the innermost trio is gazing at the professor's *living hand*, the one with which he has been demonstrating the grips and gestures made possible by this, and this, and this other newly exposed muscle or tendon.



GILLES PERESS/MAGNUM PHOTOS

According to most traditional academic iconographic readings of the painting, the trio is not looking at the professor's hand but rather gazing right past it, at the opened book beyond, in the painting's lower right-hand corner—a thick anatomical tome, supposedly representative in this context of authoritative education and the passing down of specialized knowledge. Nonsense—though, admittedly, a peculiarly self-referential art-academic, specialized-tome-generating sort of nonsense. Just look at the picture. They're looking at the professor's hand, and, indeed, they're looking at it wonderstruck, spellbound, as if they've never before seen anything like it.

For what a marvel of motility it is—with its capacity for compression and extension, for flex and repose, grip and rotation. The hand in itself is a veritable miracle. One is momentarily reminded by the living hand hovering over the recumbent, lifeless body of that other great painterly trope of creative dexterity: God's own hand extended toward the recumbent Adam's, in Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel (an image that was surely known to Rembrandt from the countless etchings then circulating throughout the Netherlands). More to the point, a flexing hand—the focus of all this awed attention—is a painter's own foremost implement, the one with which he wields his brush. You can just see Rembrandt painting the picture, his own actual hand burnishing the professor's painted one as the painted class gazes on in hushed astonishment. This is a painting, then, about looking at hands, about vision and malleability—about the fundamentals of painting itself.

Or, more generally, about living. It's not, as we are sometimes given to recalling, a morbid dwelling upon death but rather a celebration, a defiant affirmation of life and liveliness and vitality generated, as it happens, at a moment when the world was choking with death and dying.

ALL of which brought me back to the tribunal, and to those hours I'd been spending hunched in the visitors' gallery, taking in the endless tales of horror and grisly death. I thought about the judges and the lawyers, the investigators and the forensic anthropologists. I remembered, for instance, Gilles Peress's remarkable photograph of the forensic anthropologist William Haglund ever so carefully extracting a decaying body from a mass grave on a farm outside Srebrenica (another image of Death and the Professor)—the tender, almost loving way he reaches to cradle and recover the rotting corpse. Almost a Pietà image.

And I realized how, appearances to the contrary, all these labors aren't about death at all but rather about life and the living. They are about the living witness owed to every one of the once-living victims. "In these matters," the Polish poet Zbigniew Herbert (writing in the shadow of his own country's genocide-saturated history) insisted, "we must not be wrong / even by a single one / we are despite everything / the guardians of our brothers." They are about securing the possibility of an ongoing life for the survivors (the widows of Srebrenica, for instance, still stranded in limbo, straining for justice, or at least for confirmation of the fate of their loved ones). They are about healing a community once ravaged by war, so that liveliness can come flowing back over an otherwise blighted terrain. They are about the lives of generations yet to come, about breaking that cycle of atrocity followed by impunity which plays such a large role in provoking atrocious communal retribution decades down the line. And, finally, they are about restoring the equilibrium of the living world itself, the world we all share. For, as Herbert concluded in his history-laden poem, "ignorance about those who have disappeared / undermines the reality of the world." It's a lesson that Rembrandt, too, was busy teaching.

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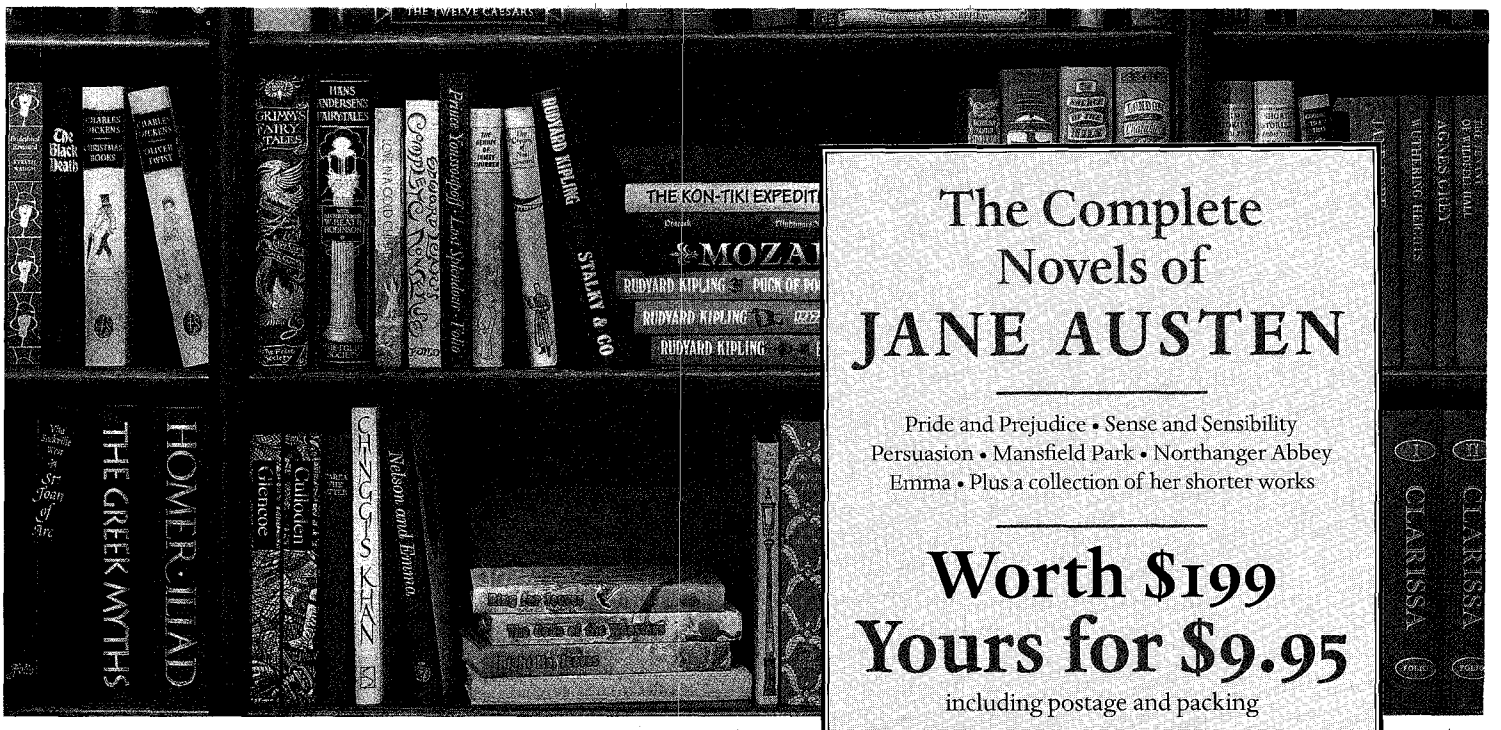

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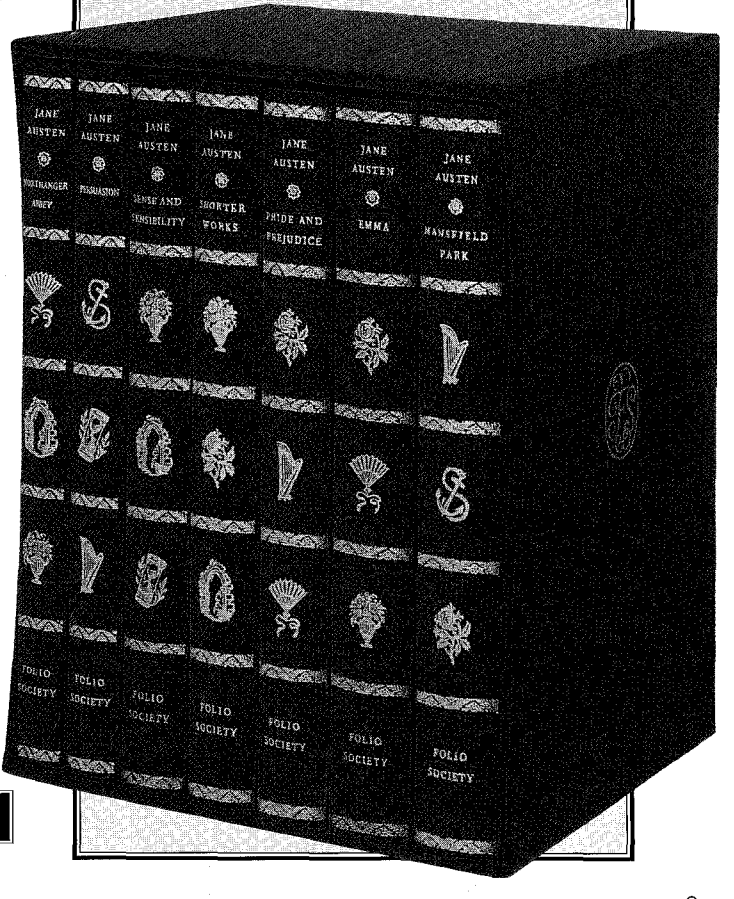

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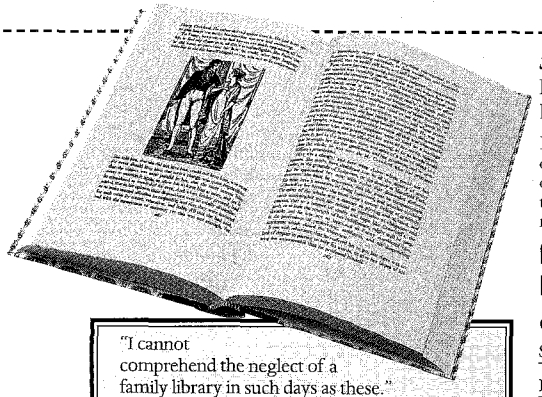

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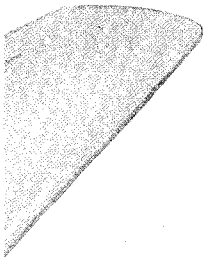
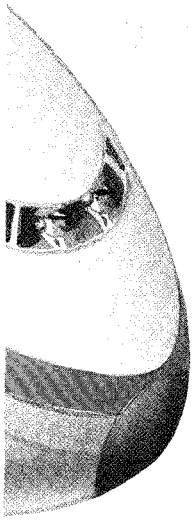
Slam and Jam

by WILLIAM LANGEWIESCHE



For all the reports of equipment failures and "close calls" and controller burnout, the nation's air-traffic-control system is in fact far less precarious, in terms of safety, than people imagine it to be. The real threat to the system's integrity has as yet received little attention



THE runways of Newark International Airport now rank among the most heavily used in the world. Day after day, night after night, in good weather and in bad, the airplanes bear down on them. Their traffic is relentless. Drivers on the adjacent New Jersey Turnpike can count on the distraction: the procession of lights inbound to the runways, the graceful touchdowns, the taxiway parades, the miraculous banked, nose-high departures. The view provides a measure of changing times. The equipment out there is complex, capable, even exotic—but the sheer quantity of it is what seems most impressive. Flying is up, and nowhere more so than in the New York metropolitan area. The big orange radar that stands beside the turnpike never stops turning.

The radar sweeps the sky beyond the eye, helping to keep watch on the intertwined arrivals and departures at New York's three major airports. The first two airports, LaGuardia and Kennedy, each handle a third of a million flights annually, and Newark, which used to be called Sleepy Hollow and is still commonly thought of as a lesser airport, is in reality now even busier than the others, accounting for nearly another half-million flights a year. Because jets fly fast and turn wide, these three airports, which once stood distinctly apart, now lie atop one another. Adding to the tangle, each of the region's smaller airports—White Plains, Teterboro, and Islip, to name but three of them—produces its own heavy flows of traffic, while just overhead pass flights cruising to and from Boston, Philadelphia, and Washington, D.C. The result is the most crowded airspace in the world.

Illustration by Robert Grossman

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It is because of this congestion that I chose New York to explore my impression, gained nationwide as a working pilot, that many of the public's concerns about air-traffic control—that the equipment is dangerously old, that safety is compromised, that poorly monitored aircraft threaten to collide in midair—are largely unwarranted. Certain elements of the air-traffic-control system *should* be cause for concern, I believe, but these relate to efficiency and morale rather than public safety.

The problem with making this argument, and with getting at the authentic problems facing air-traffic control, is that people simply refuse to believe it. If there is one thing that nearly everyone can agree on, it is that air-traffic control is critical to the safety of flight. Decades of movies and news reporting have contributed to the idea that controllers "guide" airplanes, that the task allows no room for error or inattention, that controllers must have superhuman reflexes and cool nerves, that only split-second timing and fast computers keep disaster at bay, that passengers' lives hang in the balance—and that the work of air-traffic controllers as a consequence is impossibly burdensome. These images jibe so neatly with people's instinctive distrust of flight that they have acquired the force of an accepted reality and have become the necessary starting point for any conversation about air-traffic control.

The plain truth, however, is that this "reality" is something of a myth. You will never hear it being punctured by the controllers, in part because the myth gives them leverage with the public. To be sure, we must on no account brush aside the potential for accidents in flight. Concern for safety is the bottom line of all aviation—in the cockpit as well as in the control room. But within air-traffic control, concern for safety functions narrowly, atop a high level of safety provided already by pilots and aircraft designers. Mistakes by controllers have led to accidents, but only as one link in a chain of unfortunate events. Air-traffic control's main function is to provide for the efficient flow of traffic, and to allow for the efficient use of limited runway space—in other words, not primarily to keep people alive but to keep them moving.

If you equated the job with juggling you would be only half right. Like jugglers, controllers are practiced at handling constellations of flying objects. There is, however, an important difference. When jugglers get distracted, their constellations tumble to the ground. But when controllers make mistakes, or lose their radar or radio, the airplanes continue to fly. Even if these jugglers were to stop suddenly and walk away, the elements of the constellations would on their own eventually slow down, take in the situation calmly according to a variety of routine procedures, and discover places where they could all land softly. Imagine juggling in a low-gravity world using smart balls that knew how to navigate and to talk to one another, and could find ways not to collide. That, though simplified, is a more accurate picture of the worst-case environment of air-traffic control.

Of course, once the balls land, they will not rise again without the juggler. That, too, is the nature of air-traffic control. Controllers have to juggle well, and willingly, in order to keep the rapidly growing air-transport system aloft. And only the most persistent glad-talker would deny that over the past decade controllers have had difficulty, for whatever reasons, in living up to the demands placed on them. The consequences are serious, if perhaps not for safety then for the web of commerce that an efficient aviation system sustains. But air-traffic control's core problems are both less tangible and more difficult to resolve than most people imagine. Yes, hardware should be modernized, and in theory new airports could be built to relieve the growing congestion, but air-traffic control's greatest weakness is cultural and organizational, and will not yield to the microchip and the dollar.

This failing lies deep in the soul of the Federal Aviation Administration, an agency divided into two mutually antagonistic cultures, management and the working controllers, each with its own traditions and memories. The FAA has other problems as well, of course. It has been accused of wastefulness and stupidity, and has been held partly responsible for recent airline crashes, because of its role in certifying airline and airport operations. In response it has promised to streamline itself and to pay closer attention to detail; Congress has decreed other changes. But such reforms, to the extent that they touch it at all, only brush the surface of air-traffic control, a highly individualistic profession in which discontent now rises like a specter from the past.

Sixteen years have passed since the great controller strike of 1981, when Ronald Reagan fired most of the air-traffic-control work force and destroyed their union, giving the FAA the opportunity to build afresh. There is, however, a new union now, the National Air Traffic Controllers Association, and although its concerns and activities receive almost no public attention, its members are coming to be as angry as the people they replaced.

The Radar Room

ON a first visit to the cavernous radar room of New York Approach, the noise, commotion, and apparent chaos seem to validate the worst fears about air-traffic control. Certainly air-traffic control has become more dynamic than it was in days gone by—the days of men with crew cuts and white shirts, holding binoculars and saying "Roger." Controllers today wear T-shirts and jeans, and have adopted the swagger of the street. This place called New York Approach, which has responsibility for the low altitudes above the entire metropolitan area, is situated away from the airports, half an hour past Kennedy on Long Island. It is known throughout the world of aviation for the fury of its controllers, especially those assigned to the Newark sector, who work in a condition of permanent frenzy—

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shouting, complaining, joking, staring at their screens with gum-chewing concentration, swearing at their supervisors, punching the keyboards, gesturing when the radio transmissions of the pilots do not match their pace.

This is the sort of intense activity cited in cases of controller burnout, and it obscures the actual functioning of air-traffic control, making it difficult to penetrate. As a pilot, I had the advantage of speaking the language: I spent days there following the technical details, and came away feeling that the intensity was mostly self-induced, and was in fact what the controllers thrived on. The opportunity to indulge in it seemed, in fact, to be what had drawn them to the job. Keep in mind, too, that this was New York, where intensity is a way of life: like other New Yorkers, the controllers complained about the pressure on them, but largely because they would have been embarrassed not to. They complained also about the food in the cafeteria, the condition of the roads, and life on Long Island. One man finally admitted, "How can you go home from this and be satisfied mowing the lawn?" For a controller, this was practically a declaration of love. About the only time the controllers seemed genuinely upset was when they talked about the FAA.

I don't mean to diminish the controllers, or to belittle the experience and dedication they bring to the job. The sight of a radar scope swarming with little ovals, each representing a flight, is indeed daunting. But what does it mean that control rooms can sound like trading floors? Perhaps only that air-traffic control has become less regimented, more human, and more complex than originally anticipated—which may even be for the best. Argue the risks as one might, there is no doubt that air-traffic control consists increasingly of informal solutions pieced together at the last moment to cope with an overwhelming flow. In that sense it is a typically American institution—the problem coming first, the attempt to manage it coming afterward.

On the most mechanical level, the most pressing issue that air-traffic controllers face is a surge in air traffic without a commensurate expansion of runway availability. Since 1978, when President Jimmy Carter deregulated the airlines, unleashing competition among them, the number of scheduled flights in the United States has grown by nearly 70 percent. And the growth has been lopsided: of the several thousand airplanes aloft during a typical daytime rush, most are headed for the same few cities. The busiest fifty airports, out of thousands of airports altogether, now account for more than 80 percent of the nation's traffic. This is not merely because those places are where people want to go but also because to stay competitive, airlines need efficient route structures centered on hubs—the now-familiar passenger-exchange airports that by their very nature increase the number of takeoffs and landings.

Newark, for instance, does double duty as an arrival point for New York City and as a northeastern hub for Continental and Federal Express. Faced with all the inbound airplanes, its approach controllers have no choice but to deal with them. They grapple with the core problems of overcrowded airspace: that flight is fast, fluid, and determinedly forward-moving; that every airport, airplane, and pilot is different; that thunderstorms, fog, wind, ice, snow, or merely low clouds can block a route or slow a runway; that even under a clear blue sky airline schedules push airports past their limits. The slightest bump then ripples backward, forcing the controllers to scramble. A flight may miss an early turnoff from a runway, or come in too fast or slow, or ignore a call on the radio, or jump out of line with an engine shut down. A new pilot may be unsure of the local procedures. An old pilot may get huffy and insist on having his way. These things happen constantly. The resulting complications are measured in wasted fuel, wasted money, and wasted time—but not in lives, or even in levels of danger.

Many of the public's concerns about air-traffic control—that the equipment is dangerously old, that safety is compromised, that poorly monitored aircraft threaten to collide in midair—are largely unwarranted.

Across controllers' radar screens I watched the targets move in short jumps, dragging identifying tags behind them: Lufthansa, United, Continental—dozens of airplanes at a time. By assigning headings and descent paths, the controllers for the Newark sector angled the flights down from the mid-altitude collection points known as arrival gates, joined them up to the south, and swept them into an arc that took them north past the airport and skirted LaGuardia's airspace before bending back around, straight in for the runways. The purpose of the arc was only secondarily to keep the airplanes apart. Its primary purpose was nearly the oppo-

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site: to give controllers the flexibility necessary to tighten the spacing, and to exploit the occasional gaps by shooting airplanes in from the side, pushing them toward the airport ahead of sequence.

The most basic geometry of air traffic dictates that departing airplanes fan out and so usually diverge, that cruising airplanes only sometimes cross, but that arriving airplanes must inevitably converge. The traffic compresses accordion-style as the airplanes slow toward their touchdown speeds. The compression does not mean that the airplanes are in danger of rear-ending each other: closing speeds are low between airplanes flying in the same direction. The formal separation requirements, which are measured in miles, are dictated ultimately by the civilian orthodoxy that requires one airplane to taxi clear of the end of a runway before the airplane behind it lands at the beginning. Military pilots routinely fly and land in formation, and safely. I don't mean that airline pilots should too, but the margins built into standard civilian procedures are large. That is why New York Approach controllers take their pride not in the collisions they avoid—an issue that almost never comes up in the manner civilians imagine—but in the pressure they keep on runways.

The Control Tower

ONE might argue that I have described the wrong kind of controllers, that in order to understand the urgency of the work one must visit not the radar people funneling the traffic in but rather those at the receiving end of all that accumulating traffic pressure—for instance, those who stand guard at Newark International Airport itself, high atop its control tower.

When I climbed to the glass-walled cab where they work, the center of the operation was a slight young man with blond hair and birdlike reactions, whom I will call Dobkin. He wore a lightweight headset and held a transmitter switch down low in his right hand. It was Dobkin's turn on the frequency known as "local," which gave him responsibility for the airport's two parallel runways, the narrowly separated "22 Left" and "22 Right," running southwest beside the turnpike. The third runway, a short east-west reliever called "29," crossed the paths of the parallels and conflicted with their traffic. It was a cramped and awkward layout.

Dobkin said, "We work with what we've got. The parallels were built way too close for simultaneous approaches. We use the outer runway for arrivals. We use the inner runway for departures. We try to run the props over there on 29, keep them out of the way of the jets, but we can't cross them into the main approach. When the wind's light, we flip that runway back and forth, pump a load of departures to the west, then bring the inbounds around for landings to the east."

The idea that such an air-traffic controller is somehow in the business of "talking airplanes down" is part of a myth fostered specifically by the movies. Dobkin had ridden in cockpits a few times, but he knew little about the actual flying of airplanes. Between radio conversations he told me how he had come to the job after a stint as a controller in the Navy. It was a typically short story: he escaped home, learned a skill, grew tired of saluting, and hired on with the FAA because the FAA was hiring; he chose a control tower over a radar room because he liked to look at airplanes; he picked Newark for the money and the action, and sometimes wished he hadn't. He concluded his story with the false regret of a man proud of

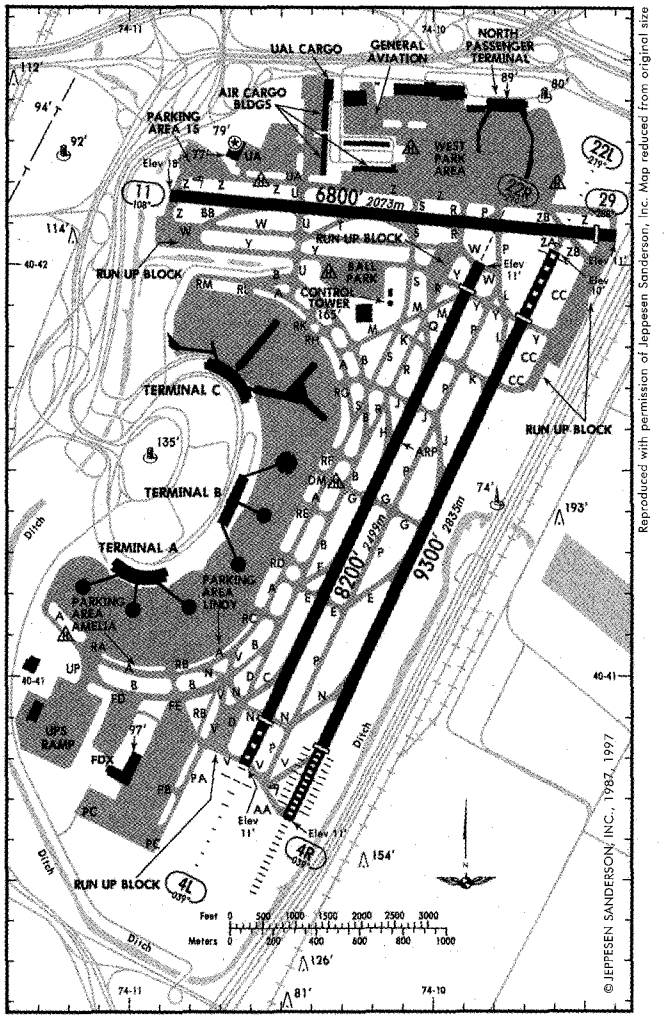

Diagram of Newark International Airport

his skills: "So here I am ten years later, just another keeper of the concrete."

He had a high-strung personality, encouraged by the work. If the purpose of his game was simple—to squeeze the maximum possible use from these three runways—in execution it was fast-paced, complex, and competitive. He said, "You've got to use every chance, every gap, to move the traffic. Slam and jam. The job keeps you on your toes."

And safety? It intruded not as an active, minute-to-minute concern but as a set of rules within which one had to perform, the most basic of which was the restriction against simultane-

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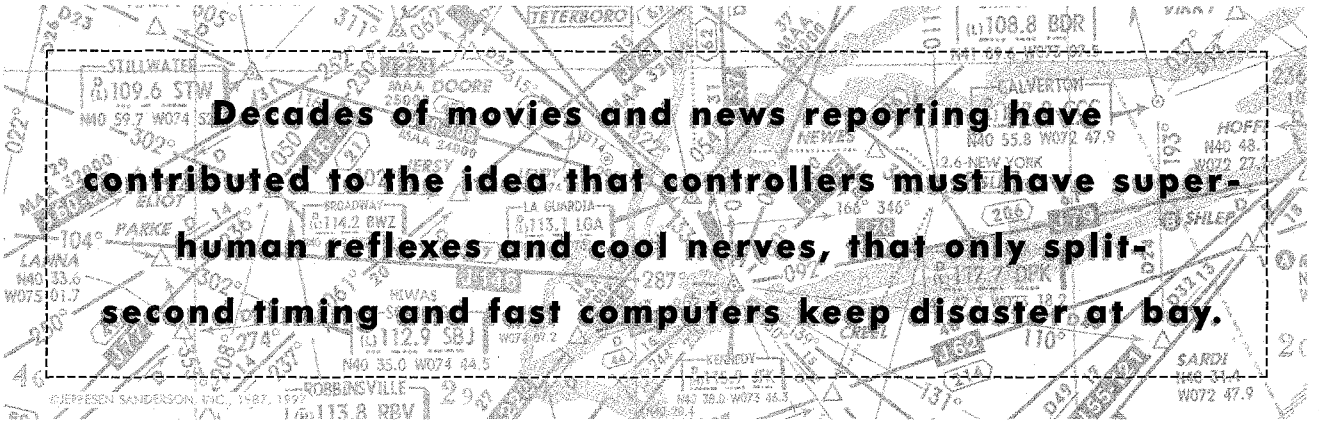
ous operations on a single runway. Perspective is needed here. The deadliest airline accident in history was a runway accident that occurred in 1977 when two 747s collided on Tenerife (in a fog, one taking off, the other taxiing across); other runway collisions have occurred. They have all, however, been freakish accidents resulting from multiple errors by both the controllers and the pilots. Except in the worst weather, or sometimes at night, pilots can easily see anyone lingering on the runway, and on their own initiative can delay their takeoffs, or if they are landing can add power and climb safely away from the ground. It is primarily because such go-arounds waste valuable landing slots, and further burden the final approach, that controllers work to avoid them. In other words, Dobkin took the timing seriously, but as an efficient practitioner of traffic flow rather than out of a sense of averting danger.

The airport beyond the glass walls crawled with airplanes moving slowly toward the runways. Thousands of passengers sat patiently in their seats. Dobkin's attention went first to the traffic pouring down the final approach. He judged the inbound lights with a familiar mixture of confidence and concentration.

The inbounds first showed up on the tower's radar screen, where we watched the work of an unseen Approach controller who was pushing the flights closer together than the tower would be able to keep up with for any length of time. Dobkin asked the pilots for speed reductions, which worked at first but soon rippled backward. The tower supervisor telephoned Approach for better service, and was told irritably that Approach itself was being force-fed by the long-distance controllers over at New York Center, who in turn were squabbling with their counterparts in Cleveland. In the meantime, because of Teterboro and LaGuardia traffic, New York Approach could not swing the Newark inbounds any wider. Approach threatened to make space by freezing turboprop departures off runway 29, a restriction that would have crowded the turboprop departures over to the parallels.

There simply was not enough room for all the airplanes, not in the air and not on the ground—at least not without delays. So far Dobkin had avoided any wasteful go-arounds, but the airplanes now were barely clearing the runway before the traffic behind flared down across the threshold. After a Delta pilot checked in with a stately drawl, Dobkin knocked twenty knots off the Continental flight that followed. To me he said, "You learn to read the signs." Delta dawdled after landing. Off the radio Dobkin snapped, "Come on, dumb boy, clear the runway." Delta did, and Continental landed short, with company behind.

The unfortunate consequence of Dobkin's success was the speed with which it was filling up the airport. To make room for the new arrivals, ground control kept pushing loaded airplanes up the taxiways toward the departure runway, 22 Right. Dobkin cleared them for takeoff as aggressively as spacing within the outbound corridor allowed. With relief provided by runway 29, the tower had managed to avoid gridlock on the ground; nonetheless, departure delays were steadily growing longer. The reason had to do with aircraft performance: while descent angles and approach speeds can be matched for most inbound traffic, optimal climb angles and speeds vary widely among departing airplanes. Moreover, because the heaviest airplanes generate especially strong wakes immediately after lift-off, additional spacing behind them is required.



Decades of movies and news reporting have contributed to the idea that controllers must have superhuman reflexes and cool nerves, that only split-second timing and fast computers keep disaster at bay.

For Dobkin the result was an inevitable irregularity in takeoff timing, which translated into the inefficient use of 22 Right. Ground control worked to reduce the effect by bunching airplanes by type so that they could be launched in quick order. The success of this strategy then created another problem: having landed on 22 Left and pulled onto the taxiways between the runways, the arrivals could not cross the departure runway to get to the terminals. They accumulated between the runways until, by threatening to block the runway exits for landing traffic, they forced Dobkin to hold the takeoffs. Dobkin tried hard to avoid such holdups by exploiting the natural gaps in the departure flow. He said, "It's Traffic 101: you cross behind a heavy jet, a seven-two, a prop. You use every chance you've got. You don't forget any part of it. You *keep* this traffic moving." What he did *not* say was "You keep this traffic apart."

Not that the lives-hanging-by-a-thread idea was entirely absent. I asked Dobkin about the famous burdens of the work, the toll on controllers in shattered health, divorce,

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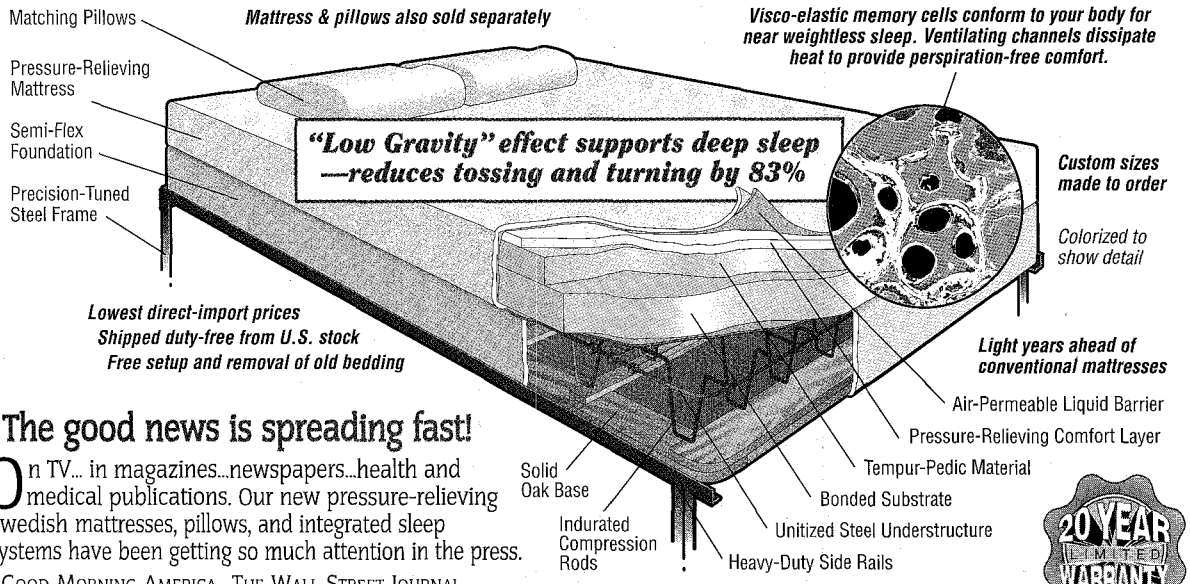

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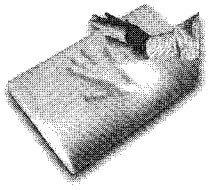

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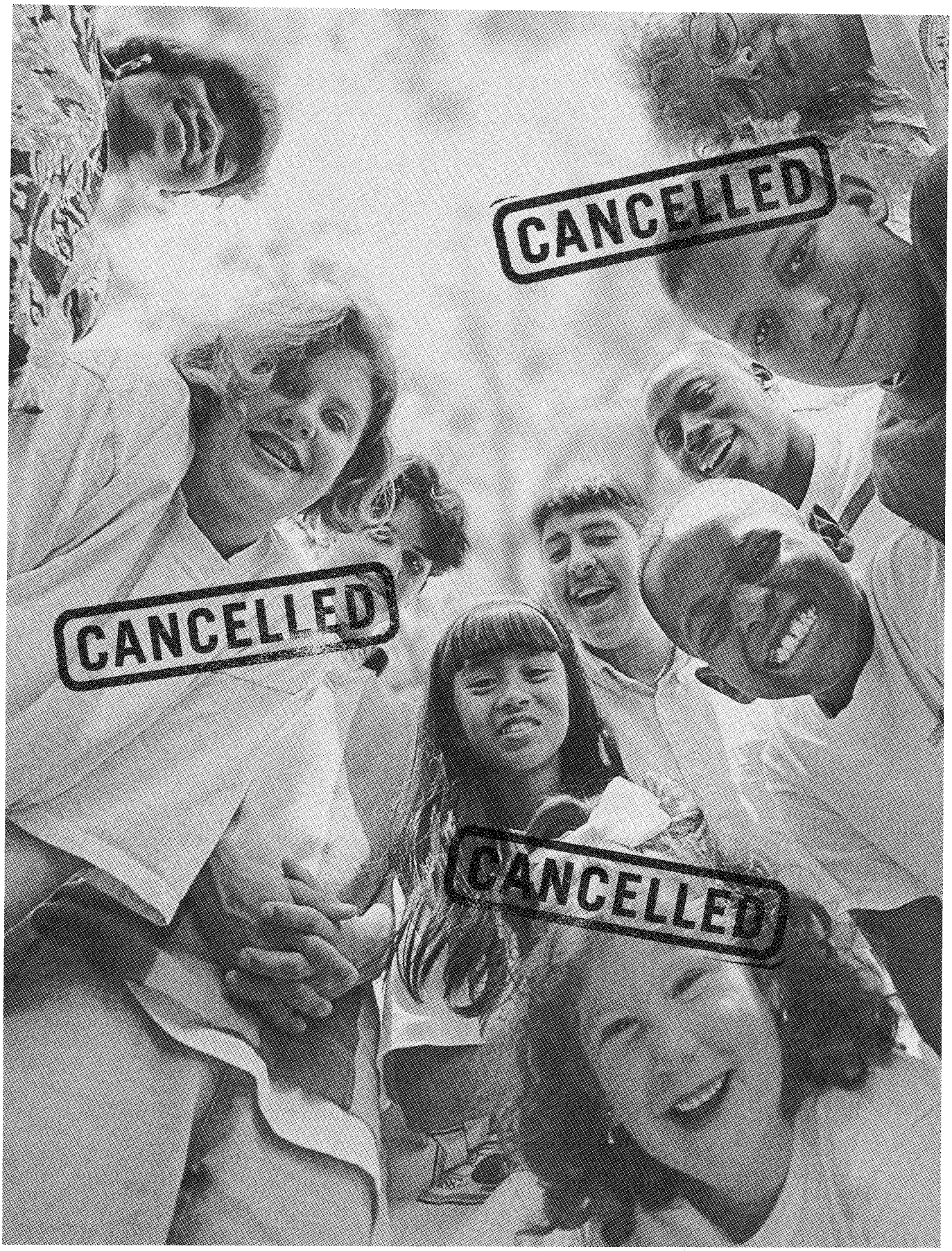

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and drink. "Sure," he said uncomfortably. "It's hard sometimes—I've known guys who had to get out."

Another controller joined in. "Me, I always picture the children. Nightmares, you know."

I may have smiled.

Dobkin indicated me with a tilt of his head. "He's a pilot." He meant it as a caution. The other man turned away, saving his emotional pitch for someone else.

Earlier a controller had said to me, "Stressed out? If you're the type, sure, but then it's the freeway traffic when you're driving to work that will really do it to you."

The View From the Air

PILOTS do not believe that air-traffic control is in the business of keeping them alive, or that it needs to be. This is a matter not of principle, or of bravado, but of simple observation. The surrounding sky is so large that even when another airplane passes nearby, it remains by comparison very small. I talked to a controller involved in research with radar simulations, who said, "You'd be amazed how hard it is to vector two airplanes into each other."

Air-traffic control does have an immediate technical presence in the cockpit, but moment by moment it has less to do with the safe operation of the airplane than with the forward progress of flight. From tower control to radar to tower again, a procession of voices accompanies each airplane across the map. Their presence is humanized by accents, moods, and informalities, and by a shared sense of accommodation and competence. Good controllers are neither automatons nor traffic cops. At the start of a trip they deliver a "clearance," assigning the airplane a computer-generated route to the destination. In an uncrowded sky such a clearance might stand alone as a guarantee of traffic-free flying, eliminating any further need for controllers. In the actual sky it serves instead as a fallback plan in the event of radio failure, and as an approximate prediction of the actual flight path.

The details fill in after takeoff. Controllers thread the departing airplanes through the first busy altitudes with headings and climb restrictions. Pilots are expected not to comply blindly but rather to judge and agree. They distinguish between the controllers' wrongs and rights. Often they can even predict their instructions.

Eventually the pilots are turned loose to proceed high and fast on course, either along the airways that zigzag across the grid of navigational stations on the ground or, more commonly, in airplanes equipped with independent long-range navigational devices, directly toward the destination. Over the continental United States the airplanes cruise under the surveillance of "centers"—en route radar facilities whose role, despite the increase in traffic, remains less interventionist than passengers might imagine: across a sky so deep and wide, "control" consists mostly of monitoring flights as they proceed by routes and altitudes that have been approved by the computers but that remain essentially the pilots' or airlines' choice. With controllers' routine approval, pilots cut corners, deviate around thunderstorms, ride good winds, slide above or below reported turbulence. Controllers intervene if they see a conflict developing, or if other controllers elsewhere ask for delays or route changes. The respective roles are clearly defined: controllers may separate airplanes, but pilots still navigate them.

Like other pilots who fly in crowded airspace, I have had close calls with traffic. But "close" can mean many things. Is it a crossing that merely surprises you, or one that requires an evasive maneuver, or one so tight and fast that no maneuver is possible? Or is it—most likely—merely the violation of an official standard that may to some extent be arbitrary? Again, collisions require extraordinarily bad luck. The sort of head-on encounter in which another airplane appears as a dot and within ten or twenty seconds fills your windshield is very rare. Neither pilots nor controllers need gunslinger reflexes. Airplanes sidle toward each other slowly.

Of course, you cannot just elbow your way through bad weather and into crowded airports. Still, let us imagine an instantaneous collapse, one day, of the nation's entire air-traffic-control system. Air transportation would of course eventually grind to a halt, and large parts of the economy would soon be paralyzed, but in the meantime safety probably would not be affected. Pilots in flight would certainly sit up and pay attention—and in some cases even grow worried and tense—but they would continue to fly and navigate normally. They would find the radio frequencies printed on the charts, and talk to their own airlines' dispatchers, and radio to one another as they do already at the many uncontrolled airports. If they were originally headed for a hub like Newark or O'Hare, they might turn and fly somewhere else. Some would have to revert to cumbersome arrival routes, and many would have to hold for a while. But few pilots would feel seriously threatened. This is all the more true in modern cockpits equipped with traffic displays. In the airplane I fly today, I often spot other airplanes electronically (not to mention by looking outside) before controllers mention them to me.

Certainly the air-traffic-control system has become an ill-planned patchwork with geographic overlaps, conflicting procedures, and chance redundancies that exist as remnants of earlier times. Airplanes move from one little zone of control to the next, are spoken to across overloaded voice-radio frequencies, are handed off from one controller to another, and are given the sort of customized service that often preempts the needs of the larger traffic flow. Individual control facilities function as parallel fiefdoms, each with its own traditions, procedures, and compromises, each speaking directly to (and squabbling with) its neighbors, without passing through any central command. If you were to design a system from scratch, you would never design this. Nonetheless, one consequence of the system's haphazard structure, of its decentral-

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ization and its very inefficiency, is to scatter whatever equipment failures there are, and to provide pilots and controllers with a rich weave of choices when something goes wrong—the radio quits, the radar quits, the computer quits. No air-traffic-control equipment failure has ever yet caused an accident.

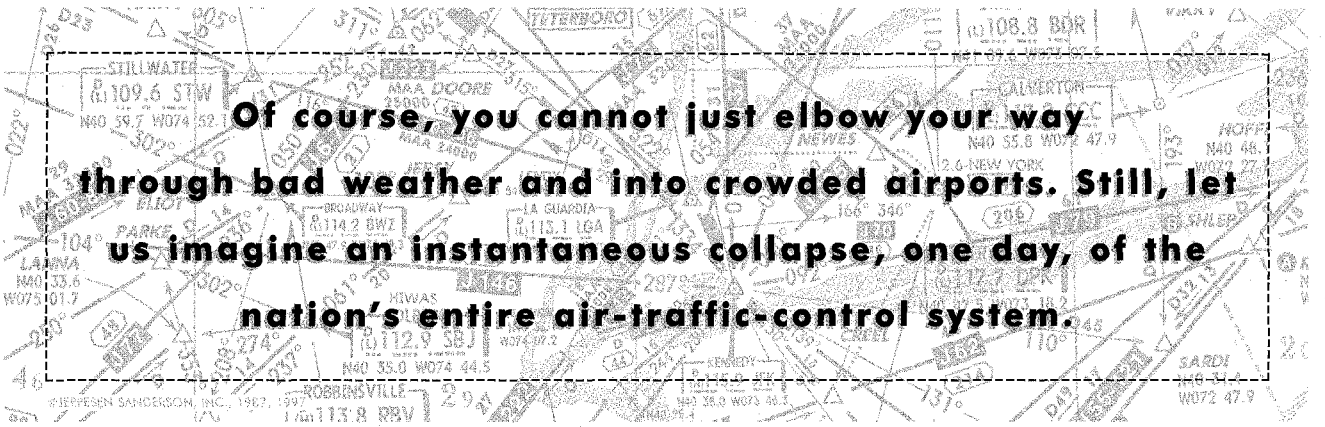
My point about the hardware is not that it is perfect but that as an educated user I do not feel threatened by its imperfections. Within such a large and complex system we can assume that equipment will wear out or become outdated, and that the government will compound the problem by responding slowly or incompetently. It is, of course, absurd that the FAA has not yet replaced all the old unreliable IBM computers that contain routing information for flights. And it is annoying that the addition of new power supplies in several centers caused outages that in turn led to major delays. And it is disgraceful that the FAA wasted hundreds of millions of dollars between an overambitious attempt to consolidate control rooms and its poorly managed, ill-conceived, and now-abandoned "advanced automation system"—an attempt to automate a wide range of internal air-traffic-control transactions. But on what basis, exactly, do people care that a controller's radar display does not contain the processing power of a personal computer (which it doesn't need)? And why do we worry that backup flight information is still written out on strips of paper? And what was the point, technically, when a Secretary of Transportation a few years ago held up an old vacuum tube for ridicule? The controllers whose workplace he meant to improve are said to have jeered at his theatrics: even he must have known that vacuum tubes are not the problem.

The Secret War

THE real problem lies not in hardware but in human relations. To understand this one has to move beyond the public myth, and beyond even the operational reality of the business, into a murky inner world of pride and collective memory.

From its origins in the 1920s among the agencies responsible for the new and bewildering activity of human flight, the FAA developed an institutional personality that was raw, arrogant, and domineering. For generations most controllers came from the military, bringing with them a hierarchical view of organization that was further encouraged by the nature of the work. The managers were controllers who had worked their way up through the ranks, taking pride in each small step, savoring the distinctions that marked their rise. Those distinctions may have been subtle at first, but they grew and strengthened, and eventually came to define management's style.

By the 1970s, however, a younger generation of controllers had become restive. Faced with a belligerent rank and file, the FAA management commissioned a team led by a psychiatrist, Robert Rose, then of Boston University, to conduct a study of controllers' mental and physical health. The Rose report, published in 1978, confirmed the popular impression that controllers had stressful jobs (they suffered disproportionately from hypertension and certain psychological difficulties, including uncontrollable anger and antisocial behavior), but it concluded that the causes had less to do with the pressures of air-traffic control than with divisiveness within the FAA: "This finding of 'It's not so much what they are doing as the context in which they are doing it' holds definite implications for changes that might be considered in the work environment to reduce the risk for future morbidity." In short, much of the problem lay in the way the FAA was run.



Of course, you cannot just elbow your way through bad weather and into crowded airports. Still, let us imagine an instantaneous collapse, one day, of the nation's entire air-traffic-control system.

Then came deregulation, and the steady growth of air traffic. At New York Approach a controller with tattooed forearms and a ponytail told me his insider's history of the Newark sector. He meant it as an insider's history of the entire national air-traffic-control system. He said, "For years you're sitting around Sleepy Hollow eating your brown-bag lunches. Then one day you look up and, Jesus, you've got a hundred airplanes inbound, and every one of them is low on fuel." This happened when deregulation pulled People Express, and then Continental and others, into the Newark void. The controller said, "The managers and headquarters types, the paper-pushers, they would have run away. The only reason the system survived was the skill of the guys working the mikes. They dropped their sandwiches. They threw away their manuals. They stood up to the traffic. They managed to patch things together."

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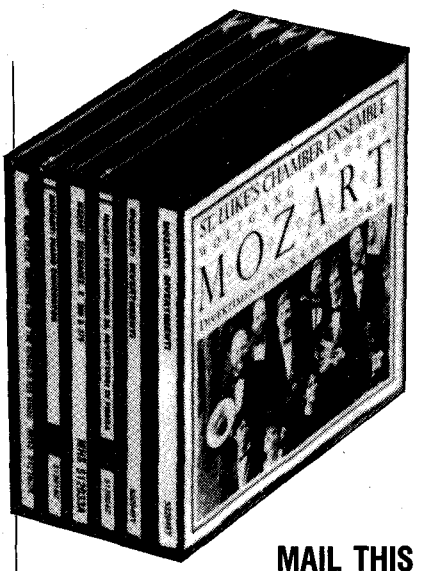

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The real history is less tidy, because nationwide in 1981 most of those valiant controllers went on strike and lost their jobs, and it was then the turn of the managers and headquarters types, emerging from the back offices and reviving old skills, to stand up to the traffic for the year that followed. The pressure was eased by a stopgap reservation system and an enforced reduction in flights. Nonetheless, to everyone's surprise, the managers actually did as good a job of controlling the air traffic as had all those "irreplaceable" union members. Working in small and enthusiastic teams, they demonstrated convincingly that parts of the old system had been overstaffed. But to accomplish this they, too, had to cut a lot of corners and ignore many of the demands of routine bureaucracy.

The frustrating part of this story is that after the FAA hired and trained a new, smaller work force of "permanent replacements," the managers returned to their offices and, in many cases, lost respect and feeling for the job the controllers had to do.

The permanent replacements—strikebreakers by another name—were naturally compliant at first. They were blank slates, the sort of fresh young recruits harboring hopes for promotion who could have been made to share the perspectives of friendly, flexible, and competent management. They gave the FAA an opportunity that other troubled organizations can only dream of—to shed the burdens of the past and move beyond outdated concepts of hierarchy and conflict. But then the strikebreaker-controllers came face to face with the airline boom, the congestion around hub airports, the front-line problems of sequencing converging airplanes. To keep the traffic moving they had to disregard a growing stream of impractical directives from the managers. There was no mystery about why the pre-strike pattern of distance, distrust, and hostility was reasserting itself (everyone involved knew the history), but it seemed all the worse for its institutional inevitability. At New York Approach, I met two brothers—one a manager, the other a controller—who had stopped speaking to each other because of it. In their anger and intractability I saw the emotionalism dividing all air-traffic control.

The resentment today is so strong that for many controllers their hatred of the FAA has become a burden that outweighs the original pleasures of the job—the "slam and jam," the giving of good service. Any sense of common purpose has long since disappeared. A controller in New York mimicked his bosses for me. He said, "When I was a controller, I worked aircraft. It was easy. I told them what to do, and they did it. Now that I'm management, I work controllers. Same deal. I tell *you* what to do, and *you* do it." Another controller, from California, wrote this to me:

> You seemed to be surprised when I mentioned that controllers have a vested interest in the failure or the embarrassment of the FAA. . . . "They" have taken our profession and our FAA and completely screwed it up. "They" have blown every opportunity to do what is right. "They" have devoted their efforts to the goddess of bureaucracy. . . . "They" have relegated "us" to second class status. "They" have completely forgotten why "they" and "we" are here.

Management, for its part, must cope with a profound political uncertainty. This is usually explained as a confusion between two missions—to promote and yet to regulate civil aviation—and the confusion has been real. (Congress last year eliminated the FAA's formal responsibility for promotion.) But the uncertainty also stems in many cases from the managers' envy of their natural adversaries, the unfettered executives of the airline industry. The executives are the people who crowd airline passengers into hub airports and then denounce the FAA for the resulting delays. And the FAA does not really disagree. The politics plays like a cultural revolution, in which disdain for the government becomes an orthodoxy required of the government itself. Moreover, it is generally agreed that airline deregulation is an experiment that has worked, and that the very growth of traffic is one proof of it. When forced, FAA managers can still talk tough about maintaining standards, but they do not dare to suggest that the market has created imbalances, and that through re-regulation or more-clever mechanisms the hubs may someday have to be abolished, the traffic dispersed. They cannot even state the obvious—that air traffic remains a classic example of the need for public control.

The FAA's managerial ambivalence only reinforces a sense among the controllers, incident by incident, that the

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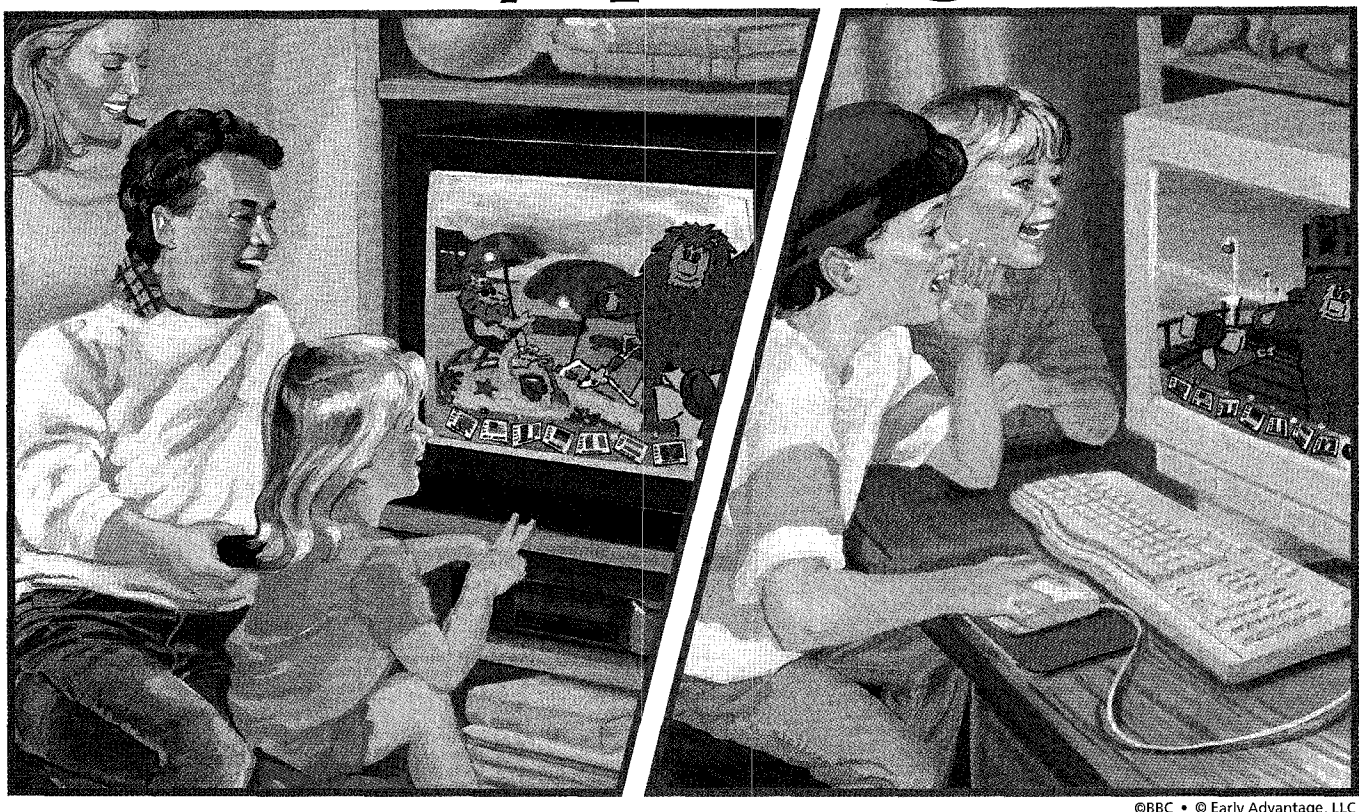

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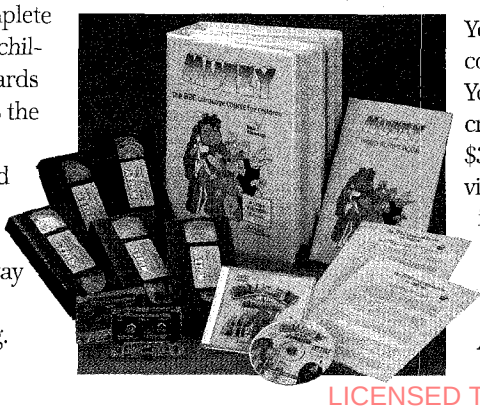

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managers do not stand up for them but instead, for example, side with the airlines in the persistent and irritating disputes over delays. These disputes have become systematic because to a degree unimagined even by many active pilots, the FAA has surrendered to free enterprise, allowing the airlines to penetrate every level of air-traffic control. Beyond taking a hand in the planning and architecture of the system, the airlines now employ full-time representatives to question the smallest operational details—a certain flight forced to hold, a certain runway selected because of weather, priority given to one airplane or denied another, a routing or even an altitude suggested. For the airlines big money is involved. Among the controllers the feeling of abandonment is so strong in certain radar rooms that some controllers would be willing to take the entire structure down. The managers know it, and in turn feel betrayed by the controllers.

What makes this fight peculiar is the coding that allows it to be waged invisibly. Practically everything about air-traffic control—whether it emanates from the controllers, their managers, or the airlines—now has a private as well as a public meaning. For instance, a proposed new system called "free flight" would give pilots more freedom to pick their own routes and more technology to help them do it safely, with less guidance from controllers. "Free flight" may mean "smart technology" and "progressive thinking" to outsiders—and it probably *would* increase the capacity of the sky—but it means something quite different to the front-line controllers. To them, it is a policy so obviously irrelevant to the bottlenecks on final approach, which greater pilot freedom can only make harder to manage, that it must be interpreted as a taunt about the value of controllers and a threat to their future. Even when new policies make sense, the controllers I have spoken with sometimes interpret them as assaults on the working men and women. The controllers fight back through alarmist "equipment failure" articles in the press and through careful cultivation of the safety myth—a tactic especially galling to the managers because they themselves lack credibility with reporters.

Also hotly contested is the use of Flow Control, a command facility with formal responsibility for the hour-by-hour functioning of the national system and the power to intervene. Flow Control originally achieved prominence as a rational response to the 1981 strike, enabling a small team at FAA headquarters, when necessary, to delay takeoffs across the nation in order to keep the reduced staffs at the busiest destinations from being overwhelmed. It was meant to be a fraternal player, the controllers' friend and adviser. Since then, however, it has turned into something quite the opposite. Based in a futuristic radar room near Dulles Airport, it has become a master center, with electronic vision that sees every airplane in the system and the authority to question and, in some circumstances, countermand decisions made by individual controllers. The problem is not simply that controllers and Flow Control often work at cross-purposes, leading to needless delays; there is also the matter of symbolism. Flow Control has inserted teams into all the regional facilities—specialists who dress better than controllers, and work under more relaxed conditions, sometimes from raised islands at the center of the control-room floors. Those who say that Flow is just another bureaucratic empire have vastly underestimated it: whatever its impact on air traffic, Flow is also in fact a Big Brother.

The controllers' union would like nothing more than to break into Flow Control. So far it has been unable to. Now the angriest controllers accuse the union itself of selling out. It is a dangerous sentiment: a similar escalation preceded the illegal strike of 1981, but that experience is still well remembered, and no one expects the controllers to make such a mistake again. One reason is that the FAA itself provides them with rules and procedures that, if strictly followed, can snarl traffic nearly as effectively as a strike. But even a rule-book slowdown seems heavy-handed, since possibilities abound for more subtle dissent. Renegade job actions in particular can be as spontaneous and creative as a controller's best work, and where the airspace is already crowded, they require just a delicate lack of cooperation to produce palpable consequences.

With such renegade actions, which have already begun, individual controllers quietly gum up the works. One man described the technique to me this way: "Slow down, speed up, slow down. Now turn right, turn left, stay up, go down." With one airplane you can create a ripple that will last for hours. You can also require unusually large in-trail spacing, or you can simply put airplanes into holding patterns. It all amounts to sabotage. The pilots involved may not be aware of the reasons, but increasingly they have begun to question their clearances, and to express dissatisfaction. Civility is disappearing. From the controllers' point of view, the beauty of such protests is that they can occur naturally in the political climate of the control rooms, and they are easily deniable, or defensible in the name of safety. The delays they cause are difficult to distinguish from other, ordinary delays. Flow Control can eventually figure out what is happening, and may try to intervene, but usually does so too late. Airline passengers are affected, of course, but that is beside the point.

Once again, the conversation is in code: renegade slowdowns deliver a clear threat within the agency, yet a threat so technical that it remains invisible to the outside world. Neither the union nor the FAA will admit that such slowdowns are going on.

Meanwhile, air traffic keeps growing. According to conservative estimates, the volume will increase by 40 percent during the next two decades. No doubt some new airports will be built. A few hubs will be broken up. And for a time the air-traffic-control system will continue to function, because of the complex forms of compensation that go on within it. But the quiet war will be waged all the while, and its nature should surprise no one if it breaks out into the open.

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Maria, Not Callas

Terrence McNally's Master Class *deliberately plays fast and loose with historical fact in search of artistic truth*

by Matthew Gurewitsch

"ART is domination. It's making people think that for that precise moment in time there is only one way, one voice. Yours."

So says Maria Callas in Terrence McNally's play *Master Class*, exposing the bold hoax that none but the most exceptional practitioners are able to pull off. When Zoe Caldwell introduced the play on Broadway, nearly two years ago, she herself perpetrated that hoax, for which she was rewarded, quite deservedly, with the fourth Tony Award of her career. Whatever one's view of the play (and lasting sentiment for and against the late diva ensured that judgments would be fierce), the role of Maria was Caldwell's property. She was a python, humorless and stern, mesmerizing in her refusal to countenance any form of compromise. Her reading was definitive, pre-emptive, exhausting all possibilities. When she departed the vehicle, it would surely fall apart.

Or so it seemed, which is exactly what would spur an ambitious actress to try to impose her own way. What is performance history, after all, but the endlessly self-renewing saga of dethronement? Caldwell left *Master Class* on June 29, 1996, at just the time of year when all but the hardiest Broadway shows wither and die, yet the New York production continued to play to good houses until this past June 28, chalking up more than 600 performances. Beyond Broadway the play has had some forty productions abroad, as far afield as Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Croatia, Estonia, France, Greece, Hungary, Israel, Italy, Japan, Korea, Mexico, New Zealand, Scandinavia, Turkey, and Yugoslavia, not to mention nine in Germany alone. Never mind the slew of productions by American regional, stock, and amateur companies, which could soon number in the dozens.

Since Caldwell, stars true and false have been stalking *Master Class* the way ballerinas do *Swan Lake*, and what at first seemed fixed now proves to be fluid. Textual variants have been creeping in: St. Patrick's is bumped for Notre Dame, Pavarotti anachronistically for Richard Tucker. No harm is done. This is the process by which classics are born.

Of the many second-generation Marias I have seen five: Patti LuPone, who took over from Caldwell on Broadway; Dixie Carter, who succeeded LuPone; Faye Dunaway, making the national tour with the movie rights in her pocket, hitting Boston, Chicago, Philadelphia, Seattle, Dayton, Houston, Fort Lauderdale, Palm Beach, Detroit, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and a score of other cities; the Fellini protégée Rossella Falk, in Milan; and Truffaut's muse Fanny Ardant, in Paris. Of all the actresses it is Ardant who yields not an inch to Caldwell, and she has the added advantage of Roman Polanski's stylish,

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psychologically richer production. Patti LuPone runs Caldwell and Ardant a close second, with Carter a respectable third. Falk and Dunaway are nowhere in sight, yet even they have light to shed on the role's multifarious—though not unlimited—possibilities.

"Art is domination." As the example of the historic Callas teaches us, great performers do not inherit. They take charge; therein lies whatever authority they have. Known to legions of worshippers as La Divina, Callas embodied an astonishing variety of tragic heroines, from the bel canto period through verismo, with such conviction that her readings remain touchstones even now—twenty years after her death, more than thirty years since her last theatrical appearance, and forty years since her heyday. Remastered and repackaged over and over (currently in a commemorative twenty-volume set from EMI), her albums remain best sellers while those of other divas, contemporary and past, come and go. Many listeners recognize her timbre and intensity of expression from a single recorded note; at least one critic asserts, perfectly credibly, that in certain cases Callas can be identified by a single intake of breath. Her charisma, onstage and off, blazes in photographs, too, as exhibits and books have proved time and again. And we should not discount the buzz of her tempestuous personal life—crowned by an adulterous romance with Aristotle Onassis, who entertained her, her husband, the Winston Churchills, and the Gianni Agnellis on his yacht in the presence of the apparently unruffled first Mrs. Onassis. When Jacqueline Kennedy became the second Mrs. Onassis, Callas was cut loose. The recent coffee-table volume *Callas: Images of a Legend* is chockablock with photographs as deeply branded in the memory of music lovers as those of the Kennedy assassination, the first landing on the moon, and the little Vietnamese girl burned by napalm.

Can such a personality, so much larger than life, be encompassed in a play? By some lights McNally is riding on the real-life diva's notoriety, and should more properly have invented a diva whose place in the firmament he would have been at liberty to define. But can one invent the North Star? No less a judge than Leonard Bernstein pronounced Callas the world's greatest artist. The reality of her achievement is a point of reference impossible to make up. The character that McNally calls Maria (as shall I) shares most biographical particulars with the historical diva (whom I shall continue to call Callas). But McNally's purposes in *Master Class* are only incidentally documentary. Above all the play is a highly personal, deeply perceptive meditation on the wellsprings and the consequences of supremacy in art. Without the real-life example McNally would in effect have been writing science fiction.

SINCE Aeschylus dreamed up *The Persians*, playwrights beyond number have spun fantasies about historic figures. Why should performers be exempt? On stage and at the movies we have seen actors play Edith Piaf, Billie Holiday, Lon Chaney, Charlie Chaplin, Isadora Duncan, and Vaslav Nijinsky, to name just a few. The resurrection usually incorporates an anthology of the artist's greatest moments—frequently the whole point of the exercise, affording the actor a shortcut to an ersatz glory. McNally gives the actress playing Maria no such break. "No one can sing like Maria Callas," Maria declares, speaking for her creator. McNally drives the point home with authentic Callas recordings, using the inimitable voice as a soundscape for two bravura monologues. In these passages the actress gets to show what she can do, impersonating a raft of absent characters: Callas's unromantic, doggedly devoted husband, the brick-factory owner Giovanni Battista Meneghini, nearly thirty years her senior; her coarse, sensualist lover, Aristotle Onassis; Elvira de Hidalgo, the teacher whose approval she craved; and assorted snotty backstage personnel.

McNally gives Maria a single line to sing, and that with strategic, destructive intent. The opera scene she is demonstrating to a student begins, strikingly and quite exceptionally, with speech: it is the entrance of Verdi's Lady Macbeth, who reads her husband's letter about the witches before launching into song, as Maria does in the heat of the moment. *"Ambizioso spirto tu sei, Macbetto"* is the line: "Ambitious thou art, Macbeth." "What comes out is a cracked and broken thing," McNally writes in the stage

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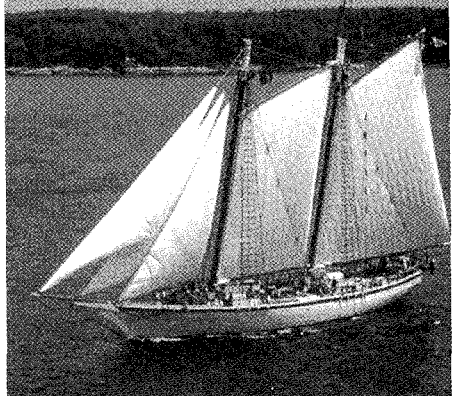
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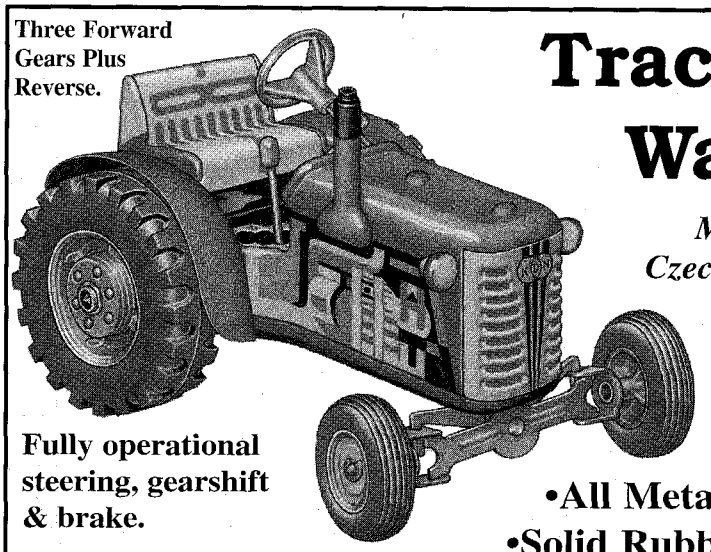

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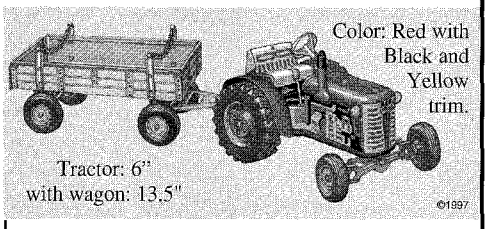

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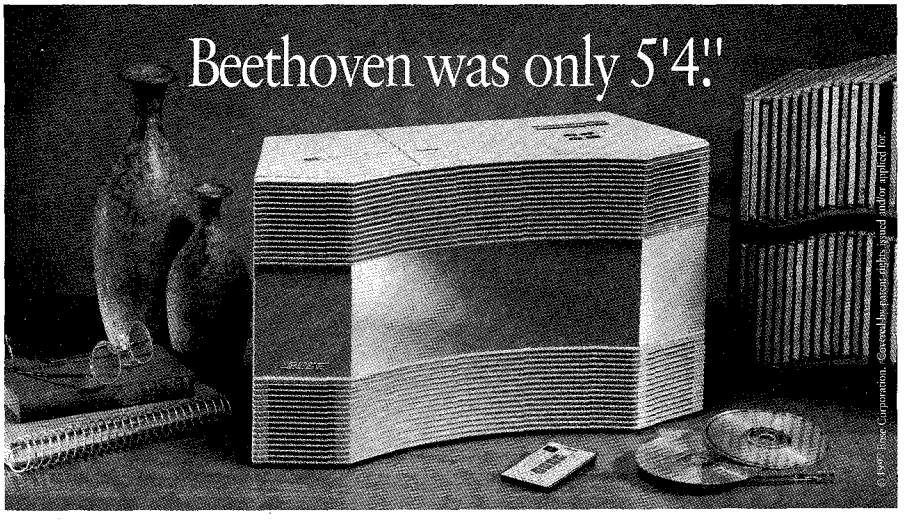

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direction. "A voice in ruins. It is a terrible moment." Yes—though a spectator in the theater, not privy to the editorializing, might well think it terrible for a different reason. In the original production Caldwell's voice was flatly incredible as the cracked and broken instrument of someone who had at any time been a singer.

CALLAS, of course, actually did conduct a famous series of twenty-three master classes, with twenty-five students, at Juilliard in 1971. People who were there (I was not) remember the classes as the sensation of the musical season, though they cannot possibly have been of much interest to readers of gossip columns. Unlike Maria, who is constantly wallowing in self-serving reminiscence and resentfully spilling beans, Callas was thoroughly prepared, rigorously technical, demanding, and relentlessly focused on the job at hand. Her concerns were breath control, diction, accents, phrasing, tempo, scales, trills. Anyone who went hoping for dish would soon have fled.

The classes were taped, and *Maria Callas at Juilliard* (EMI), a three-CD compilation (interspersed with arias culled from the extensive Callas discography), is available. The scholar John Ardoin published a more inclusive, expertly assembled book of transcripts, *Callas at Juilliard*, which is rich in musical examples. Neither source is anything like the play. On the tapes we hear a lot of singing, both from the students and from Callas; hers is seldom dulcet but always authoritative. There is not much talking, and Callas does most of that, limiting herself in the main to concise technical corrections. In the book the students vanish almost completely.

The displays of temperament, personal revelations, and lordly putdowns of the students that make McNally's script so playable are mostly pure invention. So, actually, are the musical and dramatic analyses. Of Maria's three "victims" only the tenor comes in with an aria represented on the Juilliard syllabus. Callas was especially brief and clinical on the subject of this aria, but it moves Maria to the brink of tears. With the Callas specialties brought in by the play's two sopranos, McNally is working on a clean slate.

Master Class, then, is virtually pure fabrication, for all its harping on the

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theme of authenticity—and purposely so. McNally might have included, but did not, Callas's frequent injunction to let emotion register on the face while singing a phrase, *and even before*; this is hard-won theatrical wisdom that audiences would instantly understand. But giving an aesthetic education of this sort is not McNally's concern. One rare passage in which Maria does quote Callas is perfectly in character: she is telling a student to wear a longer skirt, or slacks, because "the public that looks at you from down there sees a little more of you than you might want." "Eh?" she continues. "It's no use now. You should have thought of it before." On a more solemn note, Callas's spare farewell to the students is also preserved essentially intact.

> Whether I continue singing or not doesn't matter. *Besides, it's all there in the recordings*. What matters is that you use whatever you have learned wisely. Think of the expression of the words, of good diction, and of your own deep feelings. The only thanks I ask is that you sing properly and honestly. If you do this, I will feel repaid. *Well, that's that.*

Except for the two sentences in italics, this passage from the play matches Ardoin's transcript word for word. The remark about the recordings is also authentic, although interpolated. As for the exit line, untranscribed by Ardoin, it is heard on the CD, followed by explosive applause.

McNally is in search of a seamless imaginative truth. On the face of it, not much "happens" in *Master Class*. Maria arrives, vamps the audience (we have a role to play as auditors), and eventually settles down to the business at hand. There is some byplay with the rehearsal pianist and with a stagehand. Otherwise, for the entire first act Maria torments a timid soprano who tries her luck with Amina's heartbroken lament from Bellini's *La Sonnambula*, a celebrated Callas vehicle. The second act is split between a cocky tenor, who after a clownish beginning unexpectedly touches a chord in Maria with "Recondita armonia," from Puccini's *Tosca*; and a second soprano, this one bold and overdressed, who comes in with the letter scene from Verdi's *Macbeth*, another Callas specialty. Between volleys of sarcasm, condescension, and criticism, very seldom leavened with encouragement, Maria frequently digresses, revisiting her life and career. Toward the end of each act she has a tremendous monologue; the room vanishes as the music plunges her into a violent maelstrom of memory.

The failure of Maria's first victim to bring a pencil to class prompts a reminiscence of all but epiphanic force.

Maria: At the conservatory Madame de Hidalgo never once had to ask me if I had a pencil. And this was during the war, when a pencil wasn't something you just picked up at the five and ten. Oh no, no, no, no. A pencil meant something. It was a choice over something else. You either had a pencil or an orange. I always had a pencil. I never had an orange. And I love oranges. I knew one day I would have all the oranges I could want, but that didn't make the wanting them any less.

Have you ever been hungry?

Soprano: Not like that.

Maria: It's. It's something you remember. Always. In some part of you.

In the second act, in the context of *Macbeth*, Maria asks the other soprano, "Is there anything you would kill for, Sharon? . . . A man, a career?" (Sharon doesn't think so.) Hunger and willingness to kill: these are what make Maria who she is. Hunger, for more than oranges, fueled her art. What has destroyed her life is a love great enough to kill for. As the second grand monologue reveals, Maria *has* killed, not for her career but for a man: for Onassis, the love of her life, who has rebuffed her tenderness, saying he gives love only to his children. "Have a child of mine," he scoffs, "and I will love him." When she conceives, Onassis tells her to have an abortion. To keep him, she complies. He dumps her anyway.

The importance of the pregnancy in McNally's scheme is paramount, forging the link to the character with whom Maria most identifies, both as a woman and as an artist: Medea.

> "Ho dato tutto a te." Medea sings that to Jason when she learns he's aban-

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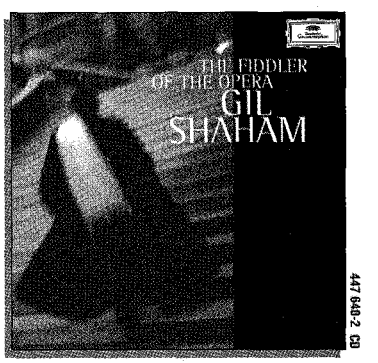

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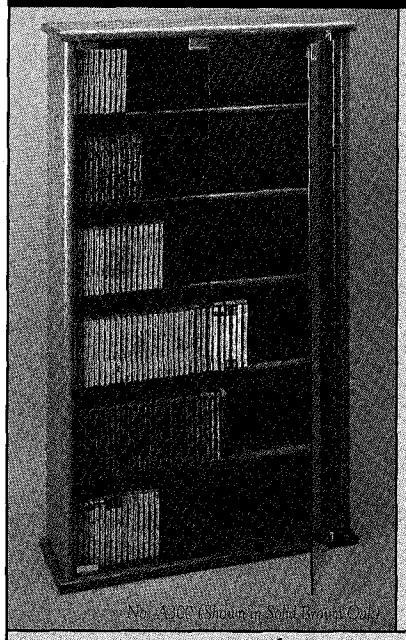

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doning her for another woman. A younger woman. A woman of importance. A princess. "Ho dato tutto a te." "I gave everything for you. Everything." That's what we artists do for people.

Though not exact, the parallels are close enough. Medea, we recall, murdered her brother for love of Jason, and later killed her own children for revenge on Jason. The princess, of course, is Jacqueline Kennedy. And Maria's climactic line in her second monologue, following her desperate cry to Onassis to marry her, is none other than Medea's: "Ho dato tutto a te." Earlier in *Master Class*, Maria has used those words to make another point: "Anyone's feelings can be hurt. Only an artist can say 'Ho dato tutto a te' center stage at La Scala and even Leonard Bernstein forgets he's Leonard Bernstein and listens to you." Unconditional devotion, unconditional sacrifice: these are the core of her life and her art. How hard it is to distinguish the two.

"Ho dato tutto a te." Few plays hinge on a line as *Master Class* does on this one. Indeed, it is in the trajectory to the final utterance of this line, and in the reading of the line when it comes, that every actress I have seen in the part of Maria has proved (or not) her worth. Leonard Foglia, who has directed all the Broadway casts and Dunaway's touring ensemble as well, has given his actresses considerable latitude to succeed or fail on their own terms. The keynote of Caldwell's performance, struck ringingly in that line, was towering, contemptuous, ice-cold rage. LuPone, Broadway's original Evita, came to Maria a diva burned by her ouster from *Sunset Boulevard*—a real-life humiliation that may have accounted in part for her pervasive attitude of plucky defiance. A younger, more flirtatious Maria, she brought forth in the climactic cry a blaze of despair and loss. Ardant's reading was at once the most enigmatic and the most haunting: she shed tears, yet her features were open, beaming, with the same lonely, Vestal-like rapture that suffused her both when her Maria spoke of her art and also—to unexpected yet utterly convincing effect—in her assessments of colleagues and students. She was crushing in her kindness. To Ardant's advantage, Polanski conceived of the students as

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real people rather than cartoonish foils for the star. (Foglia's inadequacy in this regard grows more glaring with each change of cast.)

Carter, best known as Julia Sugarbaker in the CBS Series *Designing Women*, was the most girlish of the five Marias I saw, mischievously aware of her power to entertain and gratified when her jokes got a laugh. In the main, though, her moods seemed affected rather than spontaneous. In Milan, Rossella Falk portrayed a star-struck, little-me Cinderella, back at the fireplace reminiscing about a night at the ball that didn't pan out. It wasn't a viable choice.

But Falk's failure pales in significance beside Dunaway's, since Dunaway's Maria is the one destined to achieve immortality of sorts on the screen. Dunaway has a movie star's ability to turn on pathos as one switches on a light, and the effect when she does so as the heartbroken sleepwalker Amina is fairly breathtaking. Otherwise she is still playing Bonnie Parker: winsome, hungry for life, cheerful, insecure, and more than a little dim. With the students Dunaway's Maria pulls punches, which renders especially false the awkward scene toward the end when the *Macbeth* soprano rounds on Maria and tells her off. (In my experience, only Polanski's cast makes this believable.)

Maybe by the time Dunaway takes her performance into the film studio, she, too, will have succeeded in making the role her own. Maybe she will team up with a director who can help her find the way. Word is that she was hoping for Franco Zeffirelli—an intimate of Callas's who directed the diva in historic productions of *La Traviata*, *Tosca*, and *Norma*—but that he, citing loyalty, declined. Maybe Polanski will prove amenable. It will be a pity if the movie puts an end to the burgeoning gallery of Marias.

"You must try to characterize the person you will play, decide what sort of individual she is, what her background is, what her attitudes must be," Callas said at Juilliard. "This you will get from the music, not from history. History has its Anne Boleyn, for instance, and she is quite different from the Anna Bolena of Donizetti." Whatever clues future actresses may glean from Callas's life and recordings, the text they must master is McNally's.

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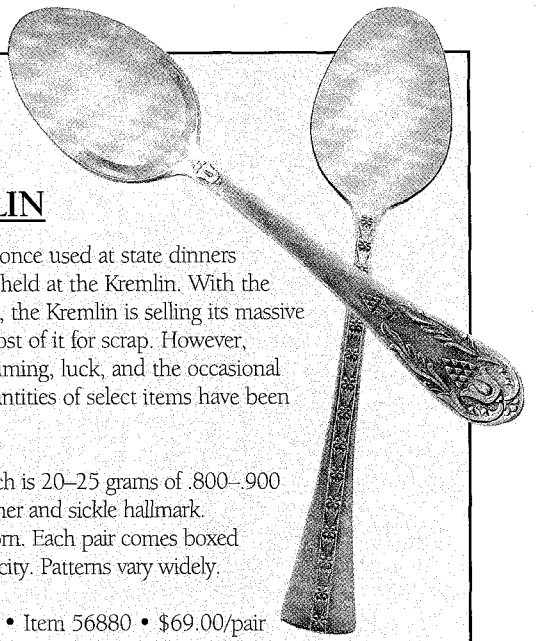

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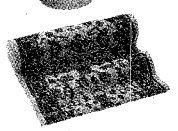

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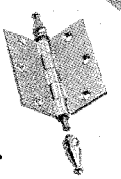

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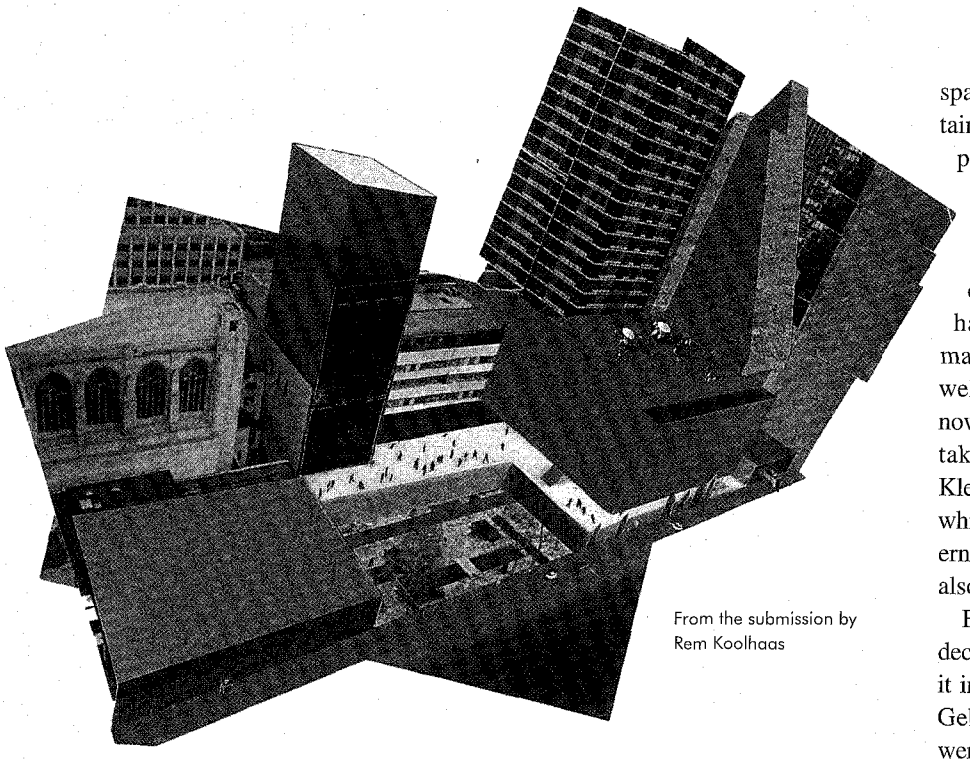

From the submission by Rem Koolhaas

Keeping the Modern Modern

By trying to keep up with the times, the Museum of Modern Art may obliterate its architectural diary of modernism

by Witold Rybczynski

ART museums have become the chief patrons of trendsetting architecture. The openings of new museums such as the Getty Center, in Los Angeles, designed by Richard Meier, and the Guggenheim in Bilbao, Spain, designed by Frank Gehry, are anticipated with the same sense of excitement that attends the openings of Steven Spielberg blockbusters. The anticipation is explained in part by art's quasi-religious status in modern society and in part by plain showmanship, resulting from the need of museums to increase attendance. Thus after the Museum of Modern Art, in New York, announced last year that it was going to undertake a major expansion, Herbert Muschamp, of *The New York Times*, described the commission as "one of the most prestigious plums that is likely to fall into any architect's lap within this decade."

The Museum of Modern Art has always seen itself as being in the vanguard of progressive architecture and design. In 1932, only three years after it was founded, the museum mounted an exhibition titled "Modern Architecture: International Exhibition." The show, which popularized the term "International Style," introduced the American public to European modernists such as Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and Walter Gropius. The idiom of Bauhaus modernism—free-flowing spaces with movable white walls, contained in a functional box—was incorporated into the Modern's new building, on West 53rd Street. That was 1939. Today modernism has joined the mainstream. Home-furnishings chains like IKEA and Crate & Barrel have brought modern design to the mass market. As for the avant garde, well, many upscale clothing boutiques now outmodern the Modern. Being overtaken by Giorgio Armani and Calvin Klein might cause a museum to worry—which probably explains why the Modern announced that its expansion would also involve a substantial redesign.

Breaking with tradition, the Modern decided to hold a design competition, and it invited ten architects to enter. Neither Gehry nor Meier was on the list. Nor were other prominent museum architects, such as I. M. Pei, who was responsible for the expansion of the Louvre; Robert Venturi, who won the international competition for the Sainsbury Wing of the National Gallery in London; Renzo Piano, the architect of the highly praised Menil Collection, in Houston; and Moshe Safdie, whose National Gallery of Canada is a superb art museum. The trustees picked instead a group of modernists who are relative newcomers—mostly in their late forties and early fifties, which is young for an architect. One could say that the trustees passed up blue chips to put their money on small-cap stocks. Architecture, like the stock market, is international, and the list included Yoshio Taniguchi and Toyo Ito, from Japan; Rem Koolhaas and Wiel Arets, from Holland; Dominique Perrault, a Frenchman; the team of Jacques Herzog and Pierre de Meuron, from Switzerland; and, from New York, Bernard Tschumi, Steven Holl, Rafael Viñoly, and Tod Williams and Billie Tsien.

THIS is hardly a representative sample of contemporary practitioners. The absence of a canonic classicist such as Allan Greenberg or John Blatteau is understandable, given the museum's roots—although both these architects would be likely to argue that their buildings are as modern as anyone else's. Certainly, though, the net could have been

ALL GRAPHICS COURTESY OF THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

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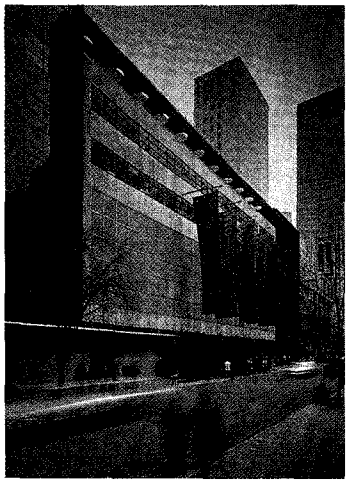
cast wider. Some of the most interesting buildings today are the work of architects, such as Aldo Rossi in Europe, and Thomas Beeby and William Rawn in this country, who are exploring the blurred edges between modernism and pre-modern architectural traditions. The buildings of John Ruble and Buzz Yudell, of Los Angeles, demonstrate that in capable hands a postmodern approach continues to produce humanist buildings of richness, satisfying complexity, and even humor. And what about an iconoclast such as Christopher Alexander, whose New Eishin University, in Japan, is a compelling demonstration of the theories he has explored in his writings? Since the late 1960s, when doctrinaire modernism ceased to hold sway, architecture has splintered; but you would hardly know this from the Modern's list of orthodox modernists. Or, more accurately, neo-modernists—architectural modernism is now more than seventy years old. Nostalgia is a relative concept.

The museum's expansion will be onto land currently occupied by the old Dorset Hotel, on West 54th Street, and two adjacent brownstones. But there is more to the project than just adding space. The ten architects were asked to demonstrate how the entire complex of museum wings could be reconfigured into a unified whole. Certain parts of the existing museum had to be conserved: the sculpture garden, most of the façade of the original building, an interior stair, and a large auditorium in the basement. But the architects were otherwise given a free hand to alter as much—or as little—as they wanted. According to the museum's director, Glenn D. Lowry, the goal of the competition was nothing less than "to conceptualize a modern museum in the context of the future."



COURTESY OF THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART/PETER HARHOLDT

The Modern today

In April the museum announced that Herzog and De Meuron, Tschumi, and Taniguchi had been chosen to proceed to the next phase of the competition. The winner is expected to be announced by the end of the year. The ten initial proposals were displayed in one of the museum's fourth-floor architecture-and-design galleries, in an exhibit titled "Toward the New Museum of Modern Art"—a self-conscious reference to Le Corbusier's great modernist manifesto of the 1920s. "Towards a New Architecture" was a call to arms full of slogans and stirring photographs of ocean liners, airplanes, and factories. The tract was more about the image of modernism than about the practical realities of building—which, of course, is why it was so effective.

THERE was not much passion in evidence at the Modern. Most of the entrants seem to have concentrated their energy on the complicated but mundane task of shoehorning additional space into the narrow site between 53rd and 54th Streets. Herzog and De Meuron pragmatically illustrated two alternatives that they confusingly called "agglomerate" and "conglomerate." Bernard Tschumi, a Swiss-French architect who is currently the dean of architecture at Columbia University, is best known for the Parc de la Villette, in Paris, which is generally considered one of the first built examples of architectural deconstructivism. Yet his entry had none of the jagged edges and odd angles that characterize that eccentric approach. Instead his sketches showed a sort of choreography—slide the entrance lobby over here, push the new galleries up there, slip in the curatorial offices. This was architecture as a Rubik's Cube. It looked competent, but I soon lost track of its permutations. At fifty-nine, Yoshio Taniguchi was the senior competitor, and his skillful planning was workmanlike even if his actual design was hard to pin down.

Steven Holl's project was more sculptural, but his crude sketches were unconvincing. Williams and Tsien showed several hurriedly drawn sections and plans, but it was unclear exactly what these added up to. Toyo Ito described his

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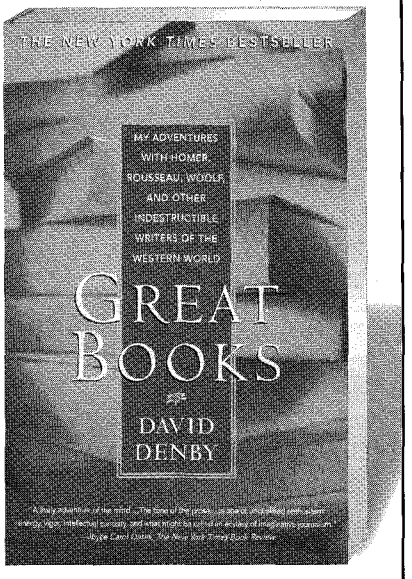

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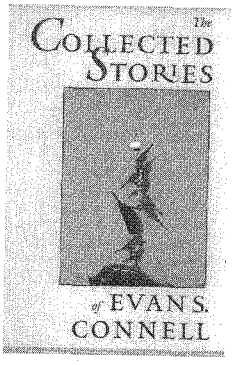

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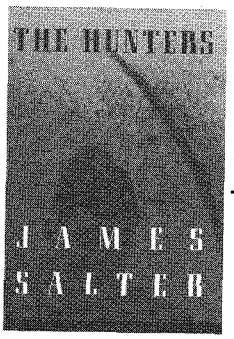

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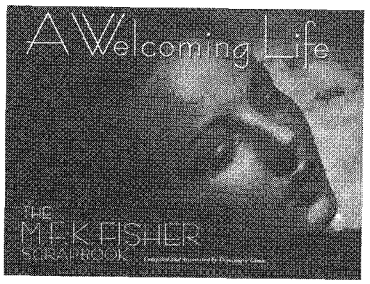

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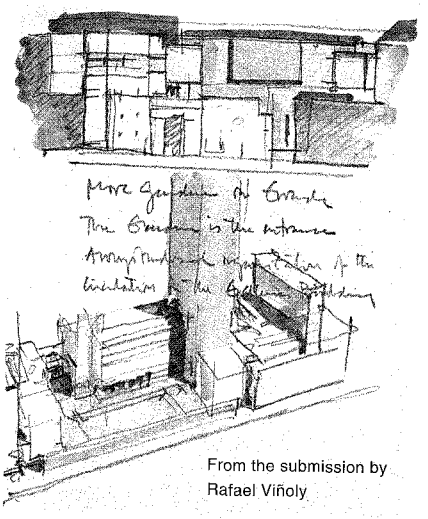
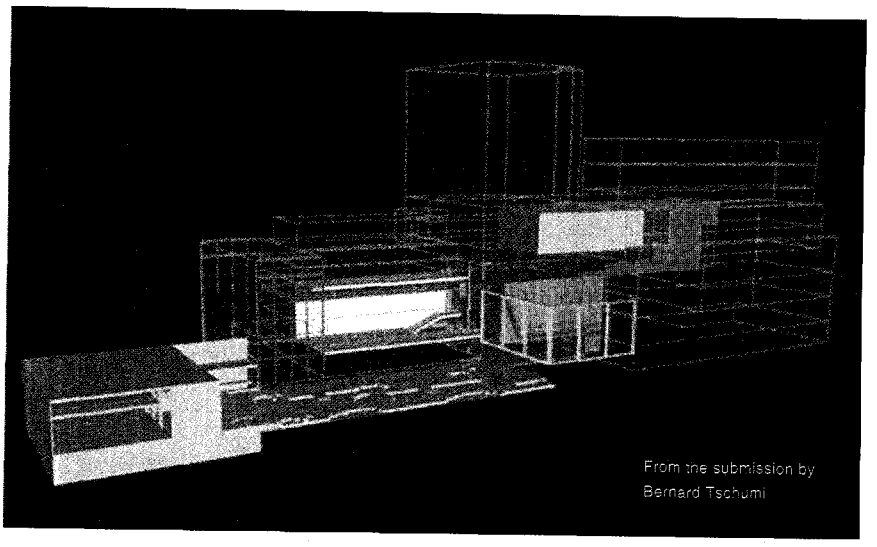
building as both a "lying down skyscraper" and a "Bar[r] code," which was an obscure reference to the Modern's first director, Alfred Barr Jr. Wiel Arets included a series of thumbnail sketches illustrating what a museumgoer would experience; the generic views included a lot of stairs and ramps. It could have been any building, anywhere.

The people around me at the exhibit appeared to be looking intently at the sketches displayed in the vitrines. What did they see that I didn't? Were they, like me, looking not *at* something but *for* something—inspiration, maybe?

The competition had required that the entire set of drawings for each entry fit into a small flat box, eleven inches by seventeen inches. As I peered at the sketches, it seemed to me that this salutary attempt to prevent the entrants from overwhelming the jury with elaborate presentations had backfired. Neo-modernist architecture relies for its effect on unadorned surfaces, large sheets of glass, articulated details, and attenuated structural supports. Transparency, precision, delicacy, and abstraction are qualities that are difficult if not impossible to convey in small, rough sketches; large, precise drawings, or better still models, are required. So the materials in the vitrines did not communicate much about their makers' intentions. This problem was compounded by the reluctance of most entrants to commit themselves to any specific architectural image. The results were more like organizational diagrams than architectural designs.

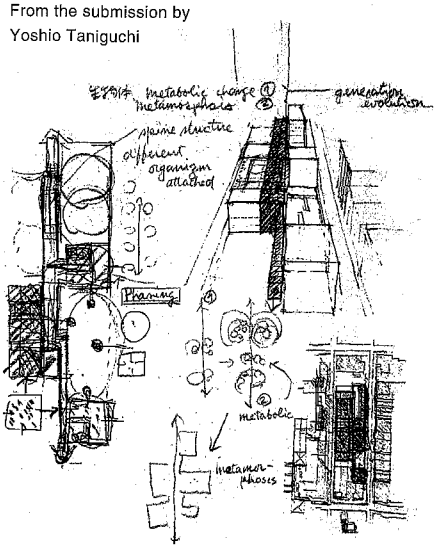


From the submission by Rafael Viñoly



From the submission by Bernard Tschumi

From the submission by Yoshio Taniguchi



Two architects from whom one might have expected a grand gesture are Rafael Viñoly and Dominique Perrault. In 1989 Viñoly won an international competition for a $1.5 billion convention and performing-arts center in Tokyo—a dramatic, monumental building with vertiginous glass lobbies and bold structural effects. Viñoly is a pragmatic modernist

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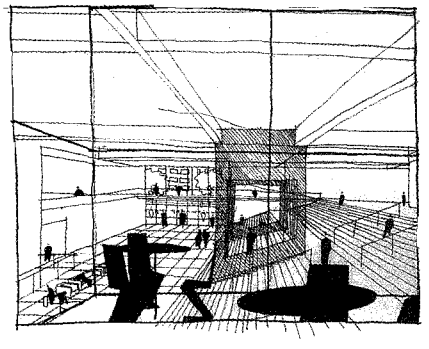
of the knock-your-socks-off school of design. Unlike some of the other competitors, he is also an accomplished draftsman. Yet here he seemed to be at a loss as to what to do on the cramped, hemmed-in site. Perrault is the architect of the controversial National Library of France, in Paris, a *grand projet* if ever there was one. Parisian wags, paying homage to the engineering of the TGV train, have christened it the TGB—*"très grande bibliothèque."* Perrault did his best with the Modern. He suggested a huge two-floor bridge the full length of the site, flying over the sculpture garden.

I had the feeling that Perrault's *très grand musée* would have been out of place in New York. That was also true of many of the other entries, which simply looked like they would be too tasteful to survive the gritty free-for-all that is midtown Manhattan. The one proposal that might have fit in was that of Rem Koolhaas, who was not among the finalists. Koolhaas is Dutch, but his sensibility is American; he once wrote a book titled *Delirious New York*. His entry in the exhibit consisted largely of collages of photographs and magazine illustrations, rather than drawings. It looked pretty



From the submission by Wiel Arets

sloppy; some of the pictures were already starting to curl at the edges. But Koolhaas is a serious designer, best known for his bold and often extremely large buildings, including the Chunnel terminal in Lille, France; recently he was hired to design the master plan for MCA's Universal City complex in Los Angeles. His approach to architecture is a curious blend of elitism and populism. This impertinent proposal for the Modern submerged the sculpture garden to basement level, added a seven-story office tower—which Koolhaas called MoMA, Inc.—on top of an existing building, and created a new multi-pur-

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What are the facts?

A history of terror. The recent outrage in Jerusalem was preceded by a similar attack in a crowded Tel Aviv restaurant, in which, by sheer good luck, "only" three people were killed.

Since the signing of the Oslo Accord, 259 Israeli Jews have been killed and close to 1,000 wounded. To put it in perspective, these 259 killed are equivalent to about 13,000 people being killed in the United States in such criminal attacks.

These are the same people who, since the "handshake", committed murderous terrorist attacks all over the world. There can be no question that they were also behind the Pan Am flight 103 plane explosion which killed 270 people, mostly Americans; that they were responsible for the blowing up of the Air Force barracks in Saudi Arabia, in which 19 Air Force personnel died; and in literally hundreds of other acts of terror. All of these terror acts are specifically authorized by Yassir Arafat, who, though now a "statesman," was classified as an international terrorist by the U.S. Department of State.

Any pretext suffices. The basic understanding with Arafat and his Palestinian Arabs was that terror and mayhem would stop. But that has not happened. On the contrary: More Jews have been killed by terror attacks since the "handshake" than in any comparable period before it. Arafat and the "Palestinian Authority" actively encourage their followers to use violence to accomplish their ends. The PLO has not even complied with the promise to amend their infamous Charter, which explicitly calls for the destruction of the State of Israel. In blood-curdling speeches, Arafat and his henchman goad their followers into violence, urging them to "liberate Palestine and Jerusalem" by jihad (holy war), "with blood and with fire".

Any pretext to violence suffices. Not too long ago, it was the opening of an entrance to an archaeological tunnel that offended the sensitivities of the Palestinian Arabs. Next it was the Israeli Jews constructing residences in the eastern part of Jerusalem on land they own. The murderous attack on the Jerusalem market, of course, had no pretext at all. It was just done out of sheer hatred for the Jews and the desire to kill as many of them as possible.

> "Only Israel should determine whether its national rights and its security requirements are being honored and fulfilled. Only then, and not before, should it be prepared to continue its negotiations with the Palestinian Arabs.

And that is the nub of the problem. Only the most naive can believe that the Palestinian Arabs (or the rest of the Arab/Muslim world) can be placated by the Israelis bringing "sacrifices for peace". Even if the Israeli Jews were prepared to hand over the entire land of Israel and only retain the enclave of Tel Aviv, it would not suffice. The elimination of any Jewish vestige is the inalterable goal.

No peace can come about until that attitude and that mindset change. And that might take a long time.

What does this mean for the so-called "peace process"? So far, the Israelis have complied with all obligations. They have turned over Gaza and all major population centers in Judea/Samaria (the "West Bank") to the Palestinian Authority (P.A.). Further transfers are planned. But all of this should stop immediately and for at least six months. Then, the minimum conditions that Israel should impose on Arafat for any continuation should be: (1) The rescission of the PLO Charter advocating the destruction of Israel; (2) A full-bore effort on the part of the PLO to totally stop all terror attacks and to apprehend and turn over to Israeli justice all terrorists now operating under the protection of the P.A. And, nobody — not the United States, any other countries, or the United Nations—should be the arbiters of this. Only Israel should determine whether its national rights and its security requirements are being honored and fulfilled. Only then, and not before, should it be prepared to continue its negotiations with the Palestinian Arabs.

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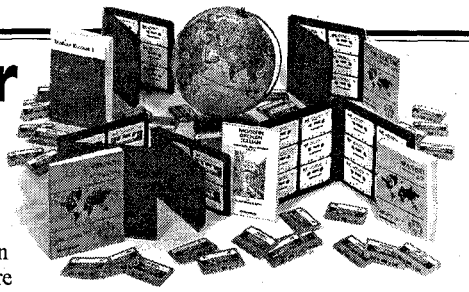

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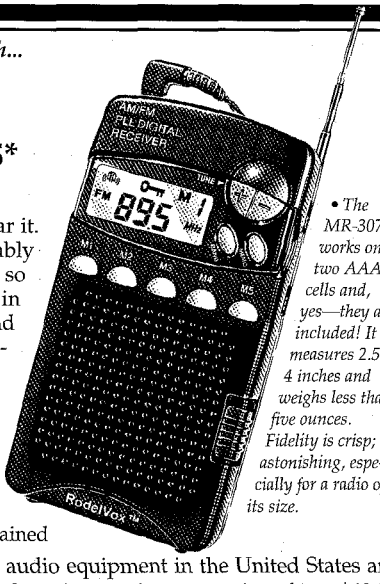

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pose space that could house a variety of museum events. Across from this so-called forum was a block housing new galleries, and above that a wedge-shaped tower. Instead of escalators and elevators a newfangled movement system—a sort of funicular—connected the galleries. Koolhaas's visual representation of his proposal was easier for me to understand than those of the other entrants. The colorful collage showed a syncopated composition of big boxes—Good Design meets The Home Depot.

KOOLHAAS'S proposal was a real effort to shake up the museum: to keep the Modern modern. "Theoretically, MoMA is about newness," he wrote in an accompanying text. "Newness is ambiguous. It cannot last; it cannot have a tradition." Koolhaas's bravura design was striking, but he had confused modernism with newness. Modernism does have a tradition—a rather long one, in fact. It was an evangelical, utopian, simplifying (some would say simple-minded) moment in history—and it has passed. It is, in Robert Hughes's pithy phrase, "the future that was." Shaking things up, as Koolhaas proposed, will not re-create it. Nor will any amount of the minimal, austere, and functionalist architecture that the Modern seems intent on building.

Indeed, there is something wrongheaded about the very idea of "making over" the Modern. For almost sixty years the museum has grown in fits and starts. The sculpture garden was added in 1953, a lobby, two wings, and an enlarged garden in 1964, and the glazed garden hall and additional galleries in 1984. With the possible exception of the garden, none of this architecture is particularly distinguished. (This has not prevented the Modern from becoming the premier museum of its kind.) The most that can be said about the varied bits and pieces is that they reflect their different times: the white box of the idealistic thirties, the perfect Miesian garden of the fifties, the curtain walls of the self-assured sixties, and the atrium of the pragmatic eighties. For better or worse, this clumsy patchwork embodies the ebb and flow of modernism itself. If we must have austere minimalism in the nineties, then let it take its place alongside the other styles. It, too, will pass.

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An Underhistory of Mid-Century America

A Dantean novel, to be talked about for years to come

by Tom LeClair

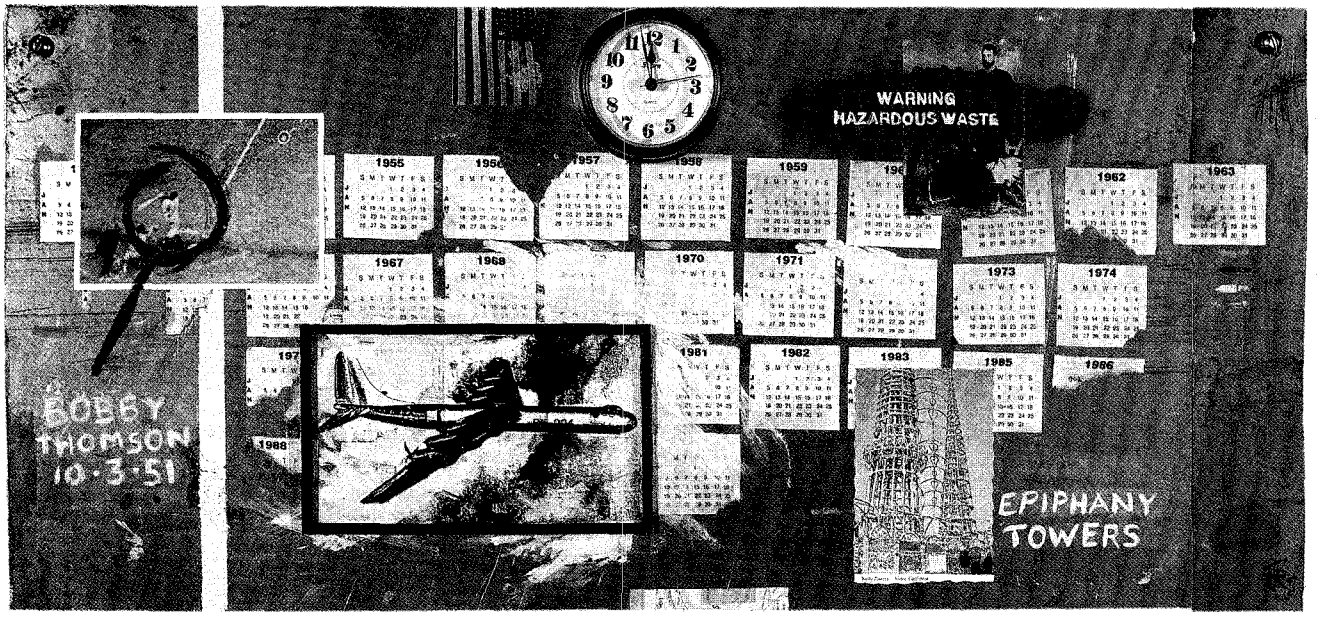
UNDERWORLD

by Don DeLillo.
Scribner, 827 pages, $27.50.

"I DON'T Want to Talk About It" read the engraved card that Don DeLillo handed me in Athens in 1979, after I'd crossed seven time zones to interview him. "It" was his youth, growing up with Italian immigrant parents in the Bronx. Even about his books DeLillo was secretive. "When you try to unravel something you've written, you belittle it in a way," he said in the interview. "It was created as a mystery, in part." Though still suspicious of talk, DeLillo has stood up to accept awards for his past three novels: the American Book Award for *White Noise* (1985), the *Irish Times*–Aer Lingus Prize for *Libra* (1988), and the PEN/Faulkner Award for *Mao II* (1991). Now sixty, DeLillo may again have to appear before a crowd, to say a few words about *Underworld*—for this huge novel, which reveals the secrets of Nick Shay, a middle-aged Italian-American from the Bronx, is an underhistory of the cultural repressions of mid-century America.

In 1982 DeLillo told another interviewer that Thomas Pynchon and William Gaddis were the contemporary American novelists who "set the standard." The author of ten previous novels, DeLillo has now produced a masterwork to rank with *Gravity's Rainbow* and *JR*. Like them, *Underworld* is an encyclopedia of native delusions and a handbook of authorial ingenuities. Revisiting the American bedrock of his younger, underclass life, DeLillo has also returned to his early artistic influences to give *Underworld* an experimental, breakout vigor. Films by Jean-Luc Godard and Federico Fellini, progressive jazz, and Abstract Expressionism—rather than literature—were the young DeLillo's guides out of the Bronx, his Jesuit education, and a corporate job. In its auteurist control, dissonant solos, and spatial form, *Underworld* resets the standard for those fiction-writing prodigies—David Foster Wallace, Richard Powers, Jonathan Franzen—who count DeLillo as a father figure.

Lest these claims and comparisons frighten off newcomers to DeLillo's world, *Underworld* offers ease of access, like hell, and a leisurely tour unified by a dark-woods wanderer, like Dante's *Inferno*. The novel begins with a fifty-page prologue titled "The Triumph of Death," which retells one of baseball's greatest games—the Giants-Dodgers playoff on October 3, 1951, the day Bobby Thomson hit his "shot heard 'round



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the world" and the Soviet Union exploded its second nuclear bomb. For Nick Shay, a dejected Dodgers fan, Thomson's home run ended innocence and marked a violent future. For America, DeLillo suggests, the Cold War elicited fake innocence, the repression of dread, and the expression of substitute emotions.

In Part I the novel shifts to 1992 and Phoenix, where Nick, a globe-trotting executive at Waste Containment, lives. Now in his late fifties, Nick has paid $34,500 for Thomson's home-run ball and uses it as a charm against late-night panic attacks. Traveling in the western desert where his brother, Matty, once worked as a weapons designer, Nick visits a former lover from the Bronx, the painter Klara Sax, who is transforming junked B-52s into a gigantic art installation. She prompts him to meditate on his present and to face shades from his past.

Nick considers his youth to be hazardous waste. Perhaps DeLillo shares that feeling—he has adopted a risky approach-avoidance narrative structure. From 1992 *Underworld* moves backward through five more parts set in earlier time periods until DeLillo rewinds to the Bronx in 1951. While delving into the private lives of Nick and Klara in each part, DeLillo takes the further risk of giving equal or greater time to the voices of their relatives, friends, and contacts, and to historical figures such as Lenny Bruce and J. Edgar Hoover.

Reverse chronology and multiple perspectives work to create DeLillo's underhistory. Digging into the secrets of Nick and Klara, we encounter public revelations of earlier decades—such as Watergate and Hoover's sexual orientation—and, more important, what DeLillo implies are the actual but unseen undersides of the periods he surveys. For example, Part II, set in the mid-1980s and early 1990s, is dominated by televised tape of a highway murder and a serial killer, a nightmare become media. Operating daily and perhaps more subversively is the characters' longing for miracles—a pornography of salvation. In Part IV, set in 1974, subway graffiti and pop art bloom, while systems analysts like Matty sit in basement bunkers locking politics and economics into coded information.

After DeLillo unearths 1951, an epilogue springs us back up to 1992 and sends Nick to an underground test site in

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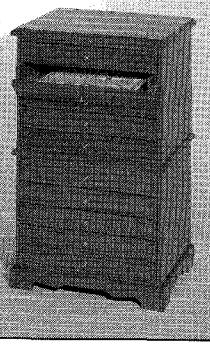

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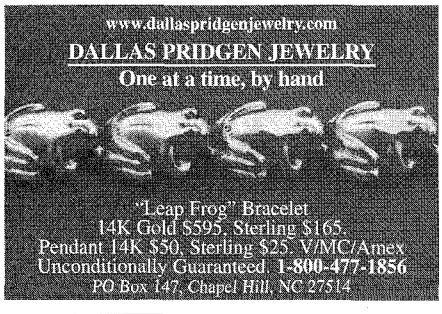

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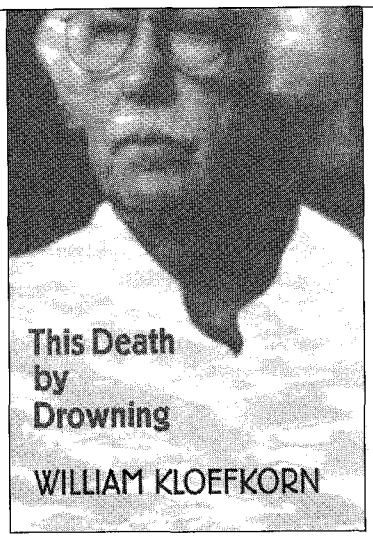
Kazakhstan where radioactive waste is atomized with bomb technology. In its largest outlines *Underworld* is about the nuclear age—when governments exploded weapons aboveground and citizens burrowed into bomb shelters. Since 1971 and his first novel, *Americana*, DeLillo has taken sometimes blunt instruments to the age's cultural excrescences: television in *Americana*, sports in *End Zone* (1972), rock music in *Great Jones Street* (1973), big science in *Ratner's Star* (1976), and fascination with terrorism in many of his other novels. In *Underworld*, DeLillo gives his most profound subject—apocalypse—his most subtle treatment, using all the novelist's devices to examine nuclear malaise and compose a narrative of its displacements. DeLillo awards readers a peace dividend—millennial hope.

KLARA Sax's spray-painted B-52s express that hope, and are one of several metaphors that represent the ambition and methods of *Underworld*. Discussing the scale of her installation, which she calls *Long Tall Sally*, Klara explains that her title comes from a nose decoration on one of the planes, the hand-painted picture of a young woman named after the song. Klara insists on the personal note, and on the pleasures of color. So does DeLillo. The novel has numerous hand-drawn minor characters—the African-American Manx Martin, father of the boy who first owned the home-run ball; Marvin Lundy, the aging Jewish-American memorabilia dealer who investigates the ball's provenance; and colorful celebrities such as Jackie Gleason and Toots Shor. From all of them, as DeLillo alternates personal and public realms, we get the pleasures of speech that sounds overheard.

Watts Towers, the huge Los Angeles construct of found objects assembled by an Italian immigrant, is also a metaphor in and for *Underworld*. Visited separately by Nick and Klara, the monument of rubbish is "riddled with epiphanies." Trained by Jesuits to find secret connections, personally and scientifically detached, Nick intuits the bomb as sacred and American culture as landfill in the abyss opened by the bomb. More outgoing and more secular in her vision, Klara records the jagged, crazed beauties of the same American dump. Like eyes in a whale's head, which look in opposite di-



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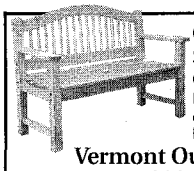

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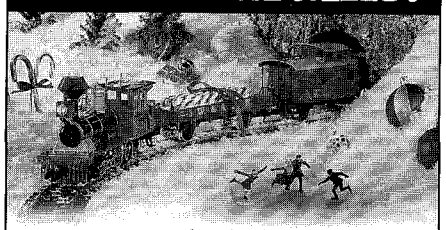

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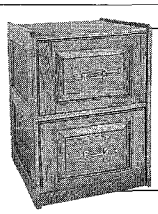

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rections, these two characters see everything that DeLillo needs to see through.

A third internal metaphor, a film titled *Unterwelt*, which DeLillo attributes to Eisenstein, reminds readers that even the most profound epiphanies have undersides—and that for DeLillo a novel should be "a mystery, in part," a world to explore but never wholly comprehend. In the film a mad scientist "in some netherland crevice" shoots an atomic-ray gun at "cripples and mutants," the "actors trailing their immense bended shadows" behind them. In the novel the shadows are also verbal—for example, DeLillo's reference to the 1927 gangster film *Underworld*. Like his punning title—which includes Dante, the Mafia, hollowed earth, humankind's sediment, ghetto life, underground politics, the subconscious, and linguistic roots—the novel piles up undertexts so dense and multiple that a first reading is only a test bore.

"I had not thought death had undone so many," Eliot translates Dante early in *The Waste Land*. The wonder of *Underworld* is its prodigality, its breadth and depth. But unlike *Unterwelt*—and like the bombers, Watts Towers, and Eliot's collage—*Underworld* does not move. Characters travel from place to place and perform sometimes violent actions, but the novel doesn't proceed along a plot line. Instead the reader moves through the book, connecting the pieces the author has arranged. "These fragments I have shored against my ruins," a voice says at the end of *The Waste Land*. DeLillo's fragments are larger, reveal more about sympathetic characters, and more concretely represent their time than Eliot's shards from all history, but *Underworld* does require an archaeologist's patience. Not all the pieces are equally interesting, but detritus can be put aside for later examination. The final words of *The Waste Land* are "Shantih shantih shantih," the "Peace that passeth understanding." The last word of *Underworld* is "Peace."

Now that the world has global peace and local wars, DeLillo has made peace with his past. In 1979 he told me about his father's wearing paper shoes when he arrived from Italy—and then cut this revelation from the transcript. I thought then that he didn't want to brag about the distance he had come as a writer. Reading *Underworld* now, I think DeLillo has spent decades wondering what artistic achievement could equal his parents' accomplishment of life in a strange new world where, in Nick's mother's words, "family was an art"—perhaps Klara's painted bombers; maybe this novel. Courageous, ingenious, and demanding, *Underworld* is a book to be talked about—by critics and readers, if not by its author—for years to come. ❦

BRIEF REVIEWS

Byrne

by Anthony Burgess.
Carroll & Graf, 160 pages, $20.00.

The late Anthony Burgess, a man of many talents and many books, did not leave quietly. His last work is this novel in ottava rima, frankly descended from *Don Juan*. Where Byron's Donny Johnny was a hapless wanderer through a corrupt and hypocritical society, Burgess's Byrne is "a lecherous defective dreamer" resembling someone in Homer called Margites. "Him the gods / Had not made skilled in craft or good in Greek. / He failed in every art." Byrne is the artist as predatory parasite. His musical compositions are hissed. His painting exhibition is closed down by the police ("The gallery was full of ladies fainting"). His reliable area of success is the bedroom—preferably one belonging to a rich widow with an itch to support the arts, although "to give Byrne his due, he was a maker, / A

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natural father far more than a wencher." Even his versifying biographer may be one of his scattered, multiracial offspring. Byrne is last seen in Marrakesh, on the run from a bigamy charge, discredited for cooperation with the Nazis, introducing "'My boys. / I prefer women, but these make less noise.'" The novel's second half concerns some of Byrne's offspring and their ludicrous attempt to rehabilitate the paternal reputation. It is as learned, witty, and wildly rhymed as the first half, and bloodies sacred cows with similar energy. If Burgess's satire has a single target, it is those excesses of avant-garde modernism that have led to what he considered dead ends. Byrne sees his proposed biography as "a cautionary tale." It is, but a vastly amusing, sparkling, stimulating variation on that dreary genre.

Questioning the Millennium

by Stephen Jay Gould.
Harmony, 192 pages, $17.95.

Foreseeing much ado over the arrival of the year 2000, Mr. Gould provides "A Rationalist's Guide" to the countdown. He covers the calendrical history—some of it practical, some of it absurd—that has put us when we think we are. He implies, courteously, that for much of the world's population A.D. 2000 has neither religious nor historical significance and is, in fact, not 2000 at all. He presents a sound defense against dateline hysteria.

Man on the Flying Trapeze

by Simon Louvish.
Norton, 576 pages, $27.50.

Mr. Louvish, who teaches at the London International Film School, must have worked long and hard on this biography of W. C. Fields. Fields was a superb comedian, but he was also a mischievous, amusing, and habitual liar. The hard-drinking curmudgeon who hated babies, kicked dogs, and stashed money in unlikely places under fantastic aliases was a deliberate invention, except for the drinking. Fields's biographer is faced with the problem of replacing entertaining fantasy with mere fact, and Mr. Louvish surmounts it very well indeed, with histories of vaudeville (Fields began as a juggler), of the extravagancies of Ziegfeld Follies, and of the uncertainties of early movie-making, while enlivening his text with effective quotations and sketches of everyone concerned—a gallery of great clowns. The reader gets a sound view of Fields and of his world.

Boyhood

by J. M. Coetzee.
Viking, 208 pages, $22.95.

Mr. Coetzee writes, as always, with striking elegance, but it is not clear whether these "Scenes From Provincial Life" are to be taken as factual memories or fictional projections. If they are fiction, the author has afflicted his young protagonist with so many problems, real or semi-imaginary, that the final family disaster becomes an anticlimax. If they are factual, one cannot avoid the suspicion that any pleasant memories have been ruthlessly suppressed. The creation of a self-operated ball-throwing rig for the solo practice of cricket was a considerable achievement for a boy aged ten, and even though it usually threw wild, it must have produced a thrill of satisfaction when it worked accurately. Triumph is mentioned, but no joy is conveyed. Individual scenes in Mr. Coetzee's text are expertly, even beautifully, presented, but as a whole the book is ambiguous and may not produce exactly the reaction that the author intended.

Sun Dancing

by Geoffrey Moorhouse.
Harcourt Brace, 304 pages, $27.00.

Mr. Moorhouse's re-creation of monastery life in medieval Ireland is half fiction and half history. The fiction consists of stories, dated from 588 to 1222, about the activities of individual monks on Skellig Michael, an island of terrifying austerity and awesome isolation. The history covers the wide-ranging and sophisticated ideological connections of early Irish Christianity, the influence of Irish scholarship on the European mainland, the surviving effects of pagan mythology, and other topics too numerous to list but of equal interest. The anchorites on Skellig Michael hoped to approach the divine through martyrdom, of which the Church recognized three degrees—white, green, and red. Red, actual death in the service of Jesus Christ, was the most meritorious but not to be achieved except through outside sources—not available in unper-

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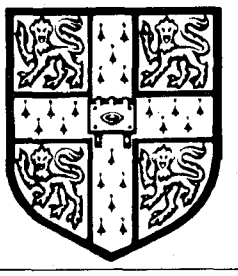

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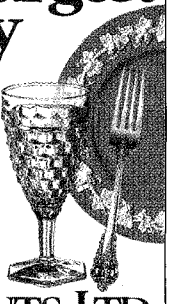

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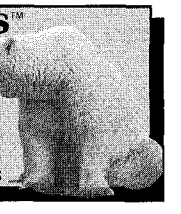

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secuted Ireland. The men on Skellig Michael counted on a combination of white and green—unheated stone huts, constant hard work, inadequate clothing, miserable food, and limited sleep. There are no statistics on life expectancy in the community. Mr. Moorhouse writes with eloquence and a quiet humor calculated to charm even the blackest of heathens.

Allan Pinkerton

by James Mackay.
Wiley, 288 pages, $27.95.

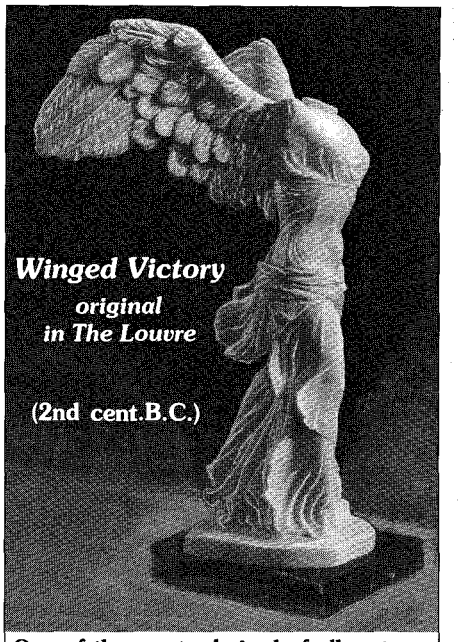
He was "The First Private Eye," a Scottish cooper who came to the United States in 1842, established a prosperous business in barrels, and was lured into detection when he accidentally revealed a talent for catching crooks. His company still exists, and many of Pinkerton's methods are still in use by police departments and the FBI. A simple success story—except for the details of criminal gangs and Civil War espionage, which provide a steady run of lively Americana.

The Origins of Angling

by John McDonald.
Lyons & Burford, 286 pages, $40.00.

"The Treatise of Fishing With an Angle" was written around 1420, according to tradition by a nun and noblewoman whose name, spelled with medieval insouciance in her own time, is here given as Juliana Berners. Mr. McDonald and his assistants (Sherman Kuhn, Dwight Webster, and the editors of *Sports Illustrated*) have been unable to document the existence of Dame Juliana, but why should anyone doubt it? Who in the sixteenth century would have invented a sporting nun? And why? This handsome book contains a modern English translation of the treatise, a facsimile of the surviving manuscript with a printed version on the opposing pages, and illustrations of the flies mentioned in the treatise. There is also bibliographic and antiquarian detail for the pleasure of specialists. Modern anglers will find that despite unfamiliar terms and the English setting, Dame Juliana was sound on the essential requirements for success on pond and stream: good gear, proper weather, and water with fish in it.

—Phoebe-Lou Adams



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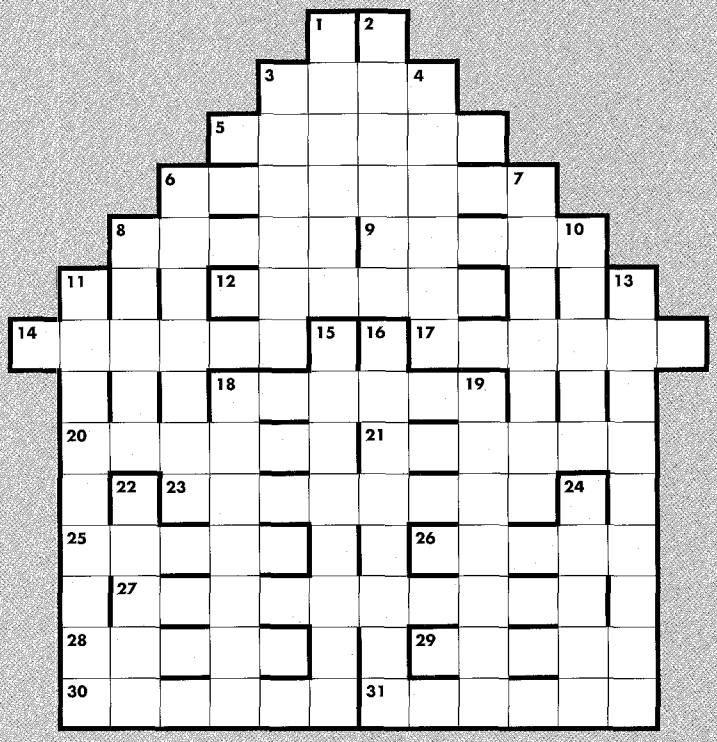
THE PUZZLER

by Emily Cox and Henry Rathvon

Haunted House

The house pictured at right is possessed by a malignant spook. As solvers will discover to their horror, this troublesome shade is perpetrating pranks of a typically ghostly nature. (To be specific, parts of eight answers are tampered with rather mischievously inside the house.) The situation calls for an exorcism, which solvers must perform. The ousted entities will spell (in order with Acrosses preceding Downs) the object of the exorcism. Five answers are capitalized; 3 Down is a variant spelling.



The solution to last month's Puzzler appears on page 106.

Across

3. Signs of a revenant showing up to this place (2,3)
5. Greek poet rearranging his ode (6)
6. A British pol in crackpot's satire (7)
8. Drink with band's leader before a dance (5)
9. Different article in operating room (5)
12. Mourn for Madagascar's last wading bird (6)
14. Skill possessed by senior English writer (6)
17. Members of the clergy most active with van in the rear (7)
18. Youngsters needing guardians on sharp rocks (7)
20. Running into Nigerian seaport's shallow waters (7)
21. Unchanging tribe's chief dressed in black (6)
23. Oafs pocketing fine round watches (8)
25. Principles of the heartless profits (6)
26. Know how to copy an appetizer (6)
27. Start suddenly and tick Jabbar off (10)
28. Former president in Communist Rumania (6)
29. Queue for bit of porridge and milk in Paris (5)
30. Like an idiot, backwardly renders name (6)
31. Wilder view: a river in the Northeast (7)

Down

1. Confusion with a General Electric commercial (7)
2. Eating doughnut tired out boss of some reporters (6)
3. Shot the same insect twice (6)
4. Somebody cheering for a drunken torero (6)
6. Copper layer cut into square shapes (5)
7. Males turned on female's last relative in retribution (7)
8. The first person in Germany, among others, with the most bread (7)
10. Almost flushing a substance to rub on a bow (5)
11. Walk back carrying a yard tool for birds (9)
13. 1971 Carole King song to T. S. Eliot, a degenerate (3,3,4)
15. Ruby, after most of booze, sporting facial hair (9)
16. Comrade catches two members of church in a scheme (9)
18. Underground part of a plant ruined oat crop (4,3)
19. Homer interrupts Gus, coming back with an expression of unconcern (5)
22. One of the French simply not fair (6)
24. Kiwi, for example, in strange attire (6)

Note: The instructions above are for this month's puzzle only. It is assumed that you know how to decipher clues. For a complete introduction to clue-solving, send an addressed, stamped long envelope to The Atlantic Puzzler, 77 North Washington Street, Boston, Mass. 02114.

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WORD IMPROVISATION

by J. E. Lighter

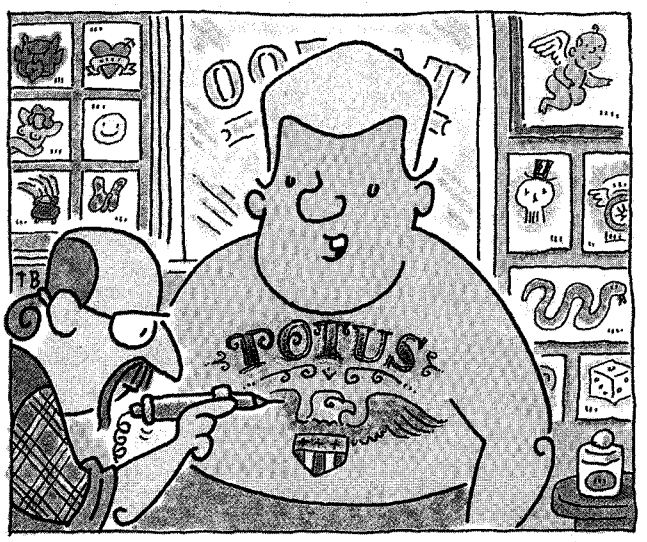
Taking Notice of POTUS

CONGRESSIONAL hearings and presidential wranglings with a special prosecutor will continue for months over the various issues (campaign finance; Whitewater) that embroil the White House in matters of law, but already the proceedings have brought to light thousands of pages of mundane documents from the executive branch.

One curious revelation concerns the extent to which the acronym *POTUS*, meaning "President of the United States," has ascended into the realm of the workaday Washington vocabulary. In 1994 the White House deputy chief of staff, Harold M. Ickes, discussed who might be able to persuade Hillary Clinton to accept the need for a special prosecutor: "*POTUS* can't. Staff can't. Christopher to talk to *FLOTUS*." *FLOTUS*, of course, stands for "First Lady of the United States." A subsequent scheduling memorandum read "Requests *potus* and *vpotus* to meet with committee of 100 to discuss China relations. Also invites *potus* to Indonesia Culture Night." "*Vpotus*," obviously, is the Vice President.

POTUS certainly has a contemporary sound. However, Franklin D. Roosevelt (who began signing himself "FDR" at the age of nine) is said to have assumed the designation *POTUS* in his wartime correspondence with the British Prime Minister Winston Churchill. (Churchill, for his part, used the code name "Former Naval Person." Roosevelt and Churchill both jokingly referred to Josef Stalin, the Soviet dictator, as "UJ," for "Uncle Joe.") *POTUS* was adopted by the White House staff and the Secret Service; it was creatively employed as the pet name favored by Buffie, the lover of President Ericson, in the 1977 novel *Full Disclosure*, by William Safire, a former speechwriter for Richard Nixon. ("First-naming a President struck her as awkward and their intimacy made 'Mr. President' ludicrous.") In an age that offers an Internet site for almost everything, it should come as no surprise that something called *POTUS* can today be found on the Web (http://www.ipl.org/ref/*POTUS*/). It is a database of research on Presidents maintained by the University of Michigan.

Nancy Reagan has been credited with inspiring, if not originating, *FLOTUS*. In his comic novel *The White House Mess* (1986) Christopher Buckley, a speechwriter for *VPOTUS* George Bush, described an analogue to the "*POTUS* phone" that has existed in the White House since the Johnson Administration: a direct White House telephone link to a somewhat vindictive and domineering *FLOTUS*. In the novel President Thomas Nelson Tucker refers to his wife as "*Flotus* Blossom." Remember, it's only fiction.



Investigations of slang by the editor of the **Random House Historical Dictionary of American Slang**

As for *First Lady* itself, the term—inspired by the nonspecific descriptive cliché "the first [that is, the foremost] lady in the land"—was not a routine synonym for "the President's wife" until well into the current century. The *Oxford English Dictionary* fails to locate any example of *First Lady* before the Truman-Dewey campaign of 1948, although a book called *First Ladies*, by Kathleen Prindiville, about Presidents' wives, appeared in 1932. The term *First Family*, given wide prominence by the impressionist Vaughn Meader's 1962 comedy album of that name, is probably a contribution of the Kennedy years. Jacqueline Kennedy, an accomplished equestrian, once remarked, "The one thing I do not want to be called is *First Lady*. It sounds like a saddle horse." She was no doubt grateful to have escaped the CB-radio craze of the mid-1970s, which bestowed on Betty Ford, the wife of President Gerald R. Ford, the handle *First Mama*.

Alben W. Barkley, the Vice President during Harry Truman's second term, was the inaugural recipient of the nickname *Veep*, a term created perhaps as a conflation of the pedestrian vice-presidential abbreviation *VP* with *VIP*, meaning "very important person," the latter a usage that emerged before the Second World War. The passage of *Veep* into the mainstream of American English was surely eased by the prior existence of *Jeep*, the popular wartime military vehicle (whose name came from the *Popeye* comic strip in 1936). At least since 1980 the term *Beep* has been used in New York City to refer to each of the city's five BPs, or borough presidents. The term isn't quite onomatopoeic (a BP doesn't literally go *beep*), but it's somehow appropriate that the sound of New York traffic comes through.

There is as yet no acronym designating the Vice President's spouse. By extension, the wife of the Vice President, and therefore the Second Lady, should be known as *SLOTUS*. Considering that she is only a "heartbeat away from" full *FLOTUS* status, perhaps a better designation would be *HAFFLOTUS*.

Illustration by Tom Bloom

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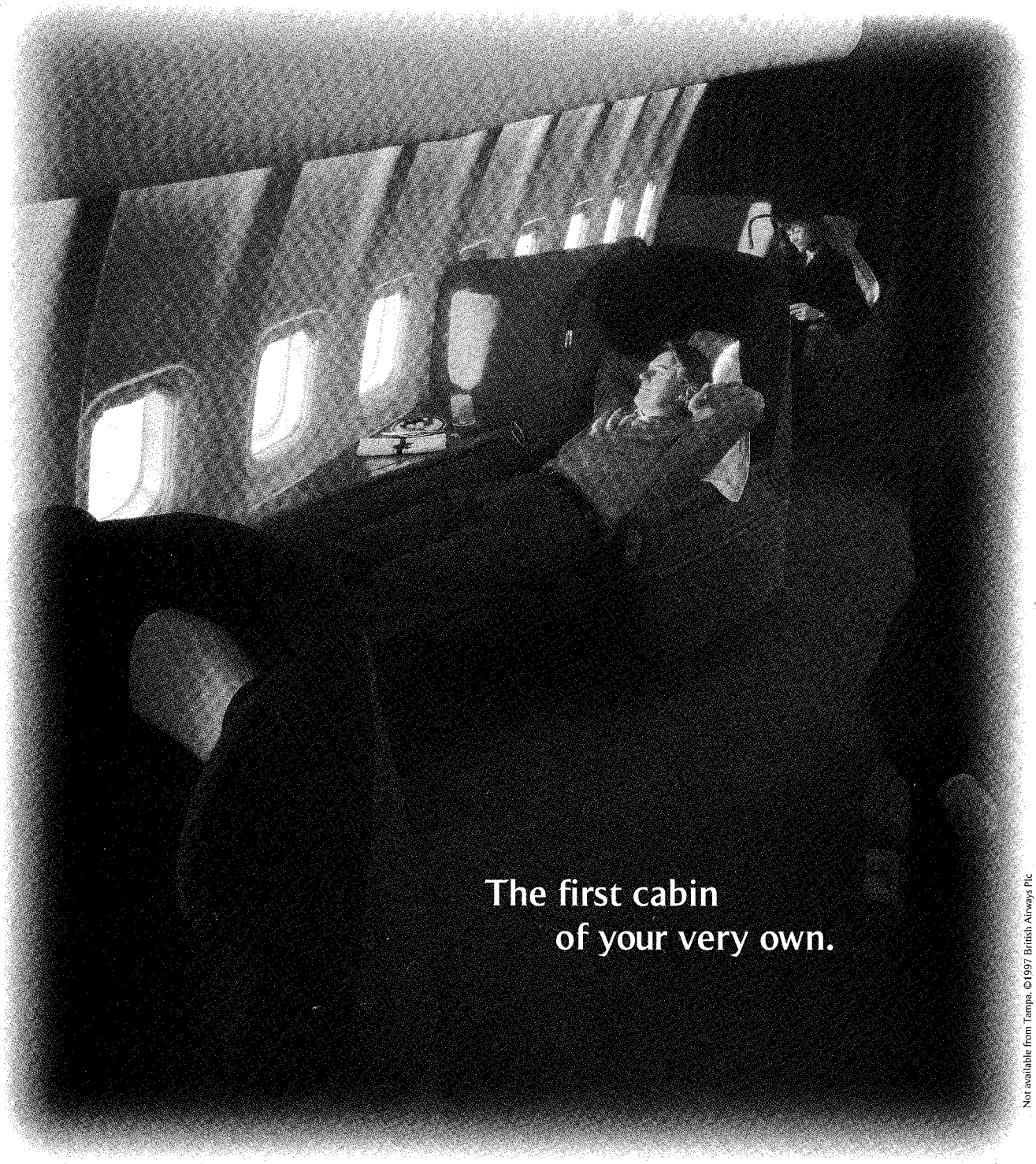

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